



JACK

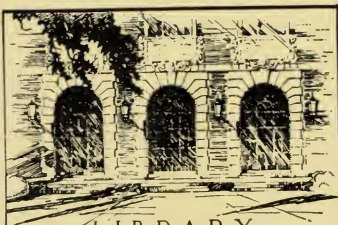


BRERETON



By

M. M. COX



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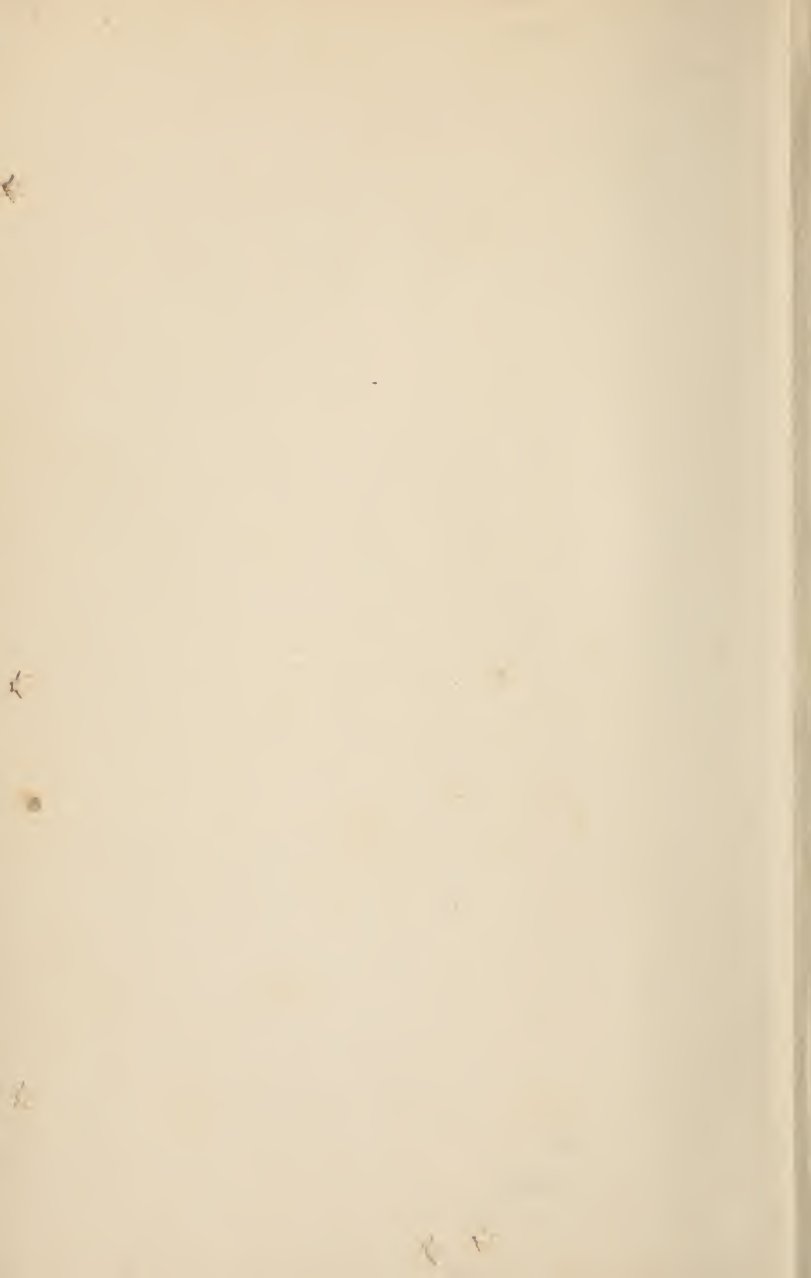
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"FORWARD MARCH!"

JACK BRERETON'S
THREE MONTHS' SERVICE

BY
MARIA McINTOSH COX

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MENTE

BOSTON
D. LOTHROP COMPANY
WASHINGTON STREET OPPOSITE BROMFIELD

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4-24-39. B. 31 Mar. 59 J. Rolox B. Down

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JACK BRERETON'S THREE MONTHS' SERVICE.

I.

MUSTERED IN.

THE railroad by which the travelers came and went to and from Ruremont ran through a deep cut, far below the level of the little town, and it could only be reached by a steep flight of wooden steps leading down the high embankment, under which the station house was sheltered.

At the top of these steps, late in the afternoon of a certain April day, in the year 1861, stood an eager-looking boy of about fourteen, watching the passengers who were leaving the north-bound train. After an accident by which a reckless lad had lost his life, some three or

four years previous, strict orders had been issued forbidding the village children to play about the station, and although in this particular case the boy was a trustworthy fellow and growing too old to run much risk, yet his parents required him to keep the law, and at this hour and place he could be found on any afternoon of the year, let the weather be what it might. If you wanted Jack Brereton, his happy face was as sure to be seen at the head of this stair, when the clock struck six, as that you would find the dial which told the hour in its place in the church spire.

He kept his place, leaning eagerly forward, until he saw his father on the platform, and then with two bounds he cleared the space and stood panting beside him. As there were few men in the world, and certainly none in the village, with a happier disposition than this father possessed, and as nowhere, in any place, could there be a fonder son than Jack, they were the best possible friends and the jolliest

companions, and this nightly meeting was usually a merry one, and jokes and fun began from the time they were near enough to greet each other.

To-day both were grave, and all Mr. Brereton said was : "Halloo, old man !" and walking ahead of Jack he ascended the steps as if tired. At the top, the boy took the bag his father carried, and passing his hand affectionately through the strong arm already bent to receive it, they turned and walked up the road. Still neither spoke.

A buggy drove rapidly up behind and a neighbor called out : "Hi, there, Brereton! stop a minute," and not waiting to actually overtake them, he asked eagerly : "What's the latest from below? Is your regiment ordered out?"

"We are off to-morrow. Everything from Washington is as bad as it well can be."

Jack's face paled, his heart beat fast. His father going for a soldier! He felt a little

giddy, and withdrew his hand and fell back a pace or two.

"Well, I am sorry enough," said the questioner. "Does Mrs. Brereton know?"

"Not yet."

"I'll come over and see you to-night, and if I can help you in any way, or for that matter, if any one in the village can be of any use to you or your wife, why, you know you have only to speak." And now fully abreast the man stretched out his hand and grasped Mr. Brereton's.

Father and son walked on, but at a slow pace. With his arm thrown over Jack's shoulder, Mr. Brereton could feel the unusual vibration of the boy's quick heart. His hand rested on the vigorous young figure with a pressure which was in itself a caress. "You heard what I said, Jack?"

"Yes, father."

"I can't talk much about it, my boy, but there is no choice left about going, and this is

the only chance I shall have to speak with you alone, so we will walk slowly and I will explain what you ought to know and understand. Things are not turning out as the Government and the Northern people supposed. The South is more in earnest than we realized ; they are a singularly brave race of men, and they think themselves in the right. We thought this war alarm was the talk of politicians and unscrupulous men, but, Jack, it is the deliberate act of the Southern people as a body, and the struggle which we supposed would not last three months, is likely to end in a long, bitter war, and we are not ready for the emergency. If volunteers do not go at once to the front and to the defense of Washington, there is no doubt about it, Jack, there will be no more a United States of America ; nothing but a broken and divided country, awful confusion and disaster, for North and South together. To keep Washington, is a long step toward keeping the Union. Ready or unready, men

must go, and those of us who are drilled soldiers, accustomed to the use of arms, and under some military organization, are worth our weight in gold to the country now. What would you think of those that staid at home, Jack?"

"Yes, father, I see you must go." Pride and patriotism roused by his father's words, began to bring the color back to his cheeks.

"That's right, Jack. I knew you would understand. But to us, personally, this brings a sore trouble, and I am going to tell you the worst and depend on you to give me all the help you can, and after I am gone to be your mother's support and comfort."

"Yes, father," answered Jack, under his breath.

Mr. Brereton looked down into the boy's anxious face and tried to smile and meet the painfully attentive eyes with his naturally cheerful expression, but the attempt was not a signal success.

“What makes me very anxious is lack of money. I cannot bear to set your young head aching, my poor old boy, but coming up in the car I decided I ought to tell you just how things are. What we have been able to save has been spent for our new house; I have only one hundred and fifty dollars in bank, and Mr. Robson, being angry at my leaving at this busy season of the year, will undoubtedly put another man in my place, and so cut off any chance of my leaving your mother an income in my absence. My army pay will be only thirteen dollars a month! At first I thought I must at once resign from the regiment, but at last it seemed plain to me that cost what it might I must go, and leave all to God’s mercy.”

Mr. Brereton had gone beyond what he had intended to say, and was pouring into his boy’s ears the pent-up pain of his own heart.

Mr. Robson was the owner of a large hardware business, of which Mr. Brereton was general manager. An Englishman, with little love

for the country and with a natural desire to maintain the prosperity of a concern which was yielding a large profit, he resisted violently the absence of a peculiarly capable and valuable assistant, just at a time when his services were most important. He had meant his ungenerous speech as simply a threat sure to conquer Brereton in the end; but growing angry as he saw it was useless to try to detain him, he had ended by making it a positive point of issue. Brereton had remained firm, and now nothing, except, perhaps, entreaties from his wife, which he felt sure she would never utter, could alter his determination.

“What will mother do?” asked Jack.

“I can’t tell you, my son. Half this month’s salary is due me, and that, with the hundred and fifty in bank, may carry you through the three months; it’s only three months, you know, and when I get back I do not fear but that I shall find work. You, Jack, must watch over every thing. Do all my little odd jobs in the mornings

and evenings, be sure there is wood and coal in the kitchen, and plenty of fresh water drawn, don't neglect the chickens, and above all watch that your mother does not stint herself in food. She will be apt to try to save every penny, and there is enough to afford good food — remember that. She will fear some need from sickness or trouble, but I expect you to see she has enough for her daily support. When my big self is out of the way, and with no rent to pay, little as I leave, it ought to keep you comfortable, and when I return, if God wills, I am sure to find some paying work — I leave a clean record behind me, and I know my business thoroughly."

Jack walked on with a crowd of thoughts surging in his distressed mind. Father gone! Gone to war! Some, not all, soldiers come back! He revolted at the first suggestion of this horror and fled to another point: no money to come from that ready, cheerful hand which made every Saturday night a sort of holiday time, and the handing over to mother the week's

allowance as bright an event as if it were a special time of gift making, with shining quarters and ten cent pieces for himself and the little girls — father gone and mother and he, with the little ones, left to their own resources! Jack could not look up or find a word to say.

“Come, Jack, help father a little. You can take care of mother, can’t you?”

Something both in the question and the tone stirred the manliness of which there was no lack in Jack’s stout young heart; and raising his head he looked his father frankly in the eyes: “I’ll do my best; you may trust me to do *that*, father.”

The evening shadows were gathering, no one was near them and Mr. Brereton stooped and kissed his big boy. They were making a long walk of a very short one, but they still lingered.

“I am afraid,” said Jack, “that mother will be worried if we don’t hurry. She was watching for the train before I came away; I think she must have been afraid of bad news — she is not usually so anxious for the whistle.”

"I am not forgetting her, Jack," Mr. Breton answered with a grim smile, "but I must, for her sake, say all I want to, to you, while I have this last opportunity. You see you are old enough to understand, and strong enough to help, and I want to show you that I trust you entirely, and if anything should happen to me," his voice shook a little, "I want you to comprehend fully why I felt it my duty to go. I am *not* going because the regiment is going; nor because I might be called a coward if I staid at home; nor because of any glory to be won; but solely because I have no choice. If I want to preserve my country from ruin this is a call that I ought to obey. I believe I ought to give up all I have to save the Union from dissolution; position, home, and if needs be, my life also, and hardest of all that I ought even to ask your dear mother to suffer with me. You won't forget this, Jack. Try to remember it just as I have told it to you."

"I will never forget it, father."

The whiteness of the boy's usually merry face and the strained look of attention in his eyes, could be seen even in the gathering dusk.

A quick thought crossed his father's mind ; taking a lighter tone he said, " I tell you what we will do, Jack. I have been mustered into the service of the United States to-day, and I will muster you into the service of Mary Breton of Ruremont, for three months' duty. First, you know I have to judge whether you are in good condition to do a soldier's duty. You don't need close inspection, I will stand security for that: sound to the core!" He brought his hand down upon Jack's shoulder with playful violence. "Next you know you must take an oath or give a solemn promise that you will perform your duty against all enemies and obstacles. What say you, Jack? Will you be mustered in as a three months' volunteer?"

Jack could not but smile. "I would like that very much."

They were just then at their own gate. "Well, stand straight to show you are a soldier, hold up your right hand and repeat after me."

Jack, a little smile on his face as he met his father's eyes, stood like a sentry long drilled to stiff and unbending erectness, raised his hand higher than his head: "I hereby volunteer to be a faithful soldier and servant to Mary Breton of Ruremont, to defend her from all harm, and to help and comfort her, and labor for her with all my strength for the term of three months. Everything I can do I will do, so help me God. Amen."

Jack's voice followed word for word this suddenly improvised form of promise, and the deep tone of the elder man was not more earnest than the boy's clear echo; the "Amen" came out as fervently as if the fate of the nation hung upon his fidelity, and his "mustering in" was accomplished. A sense of having a duty to perform, alike solemn and beautiful, and

akin to the offering his father had made to his country, filled the boy's heart with a strange pride ; his vow seemed to have already changed his relations to everything.

A clear nervous voice called from the house-door : " John, is that you ? Do come ; I thought something had happened."

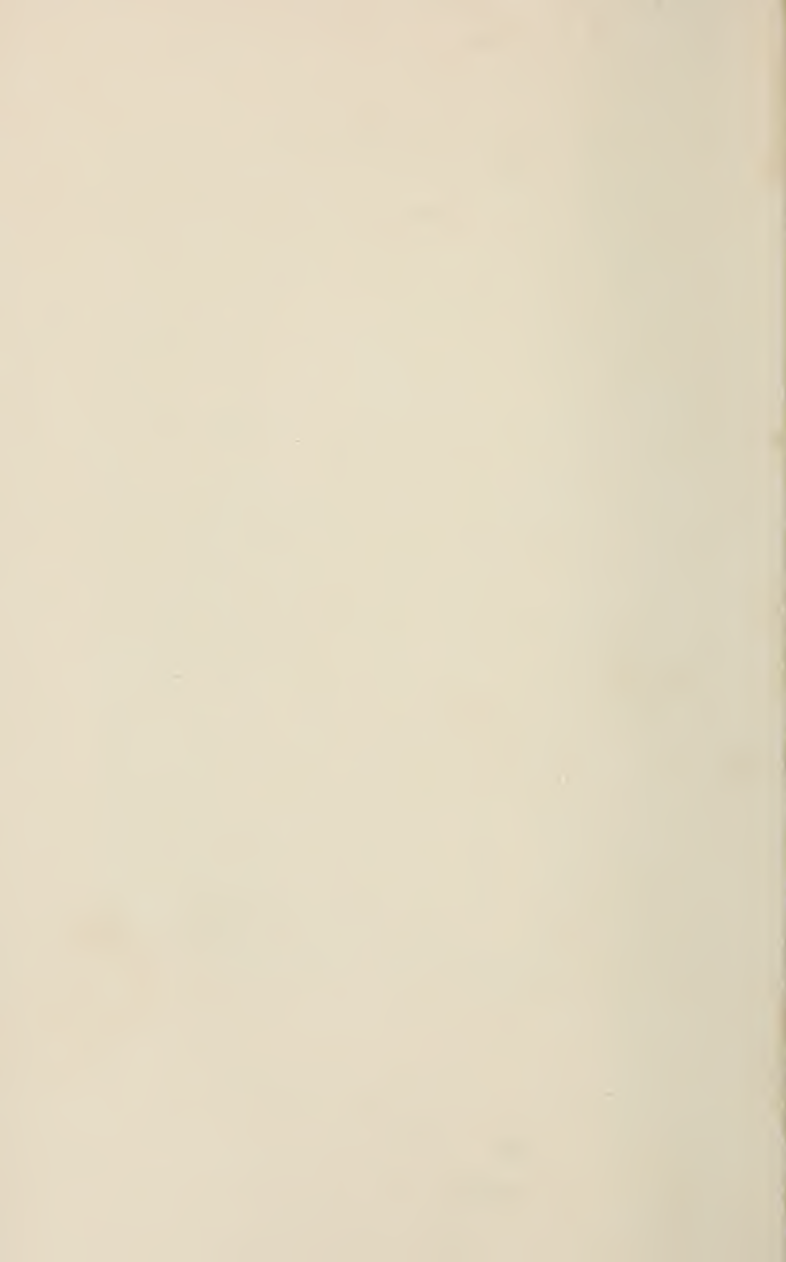
" All right, Molly," was the cheery response ; " we are coming." But despite his efforts to be brave, notwithstanding the certainty that he was doing right, John Brereton's heart sank at what he had to tell this sweet wife of his, who wearied if he were an hour late at his work, who had no life apart from him.

" Come, Jack," he said, " double quick," and falling into the running pace of a soldier, which they had often practiced together for fun, they ran forward and reached the door of the pretty cottage out of breath. It was open, and on the threshold stood Jack's mother, with her baby girl in her arms.

She was such a pretty mother, dainty in her



JACK STOOD LIKE A SENTRY.



fresh blue and white gingham dress, her soft brown hair rippling away from her broad white forehead. The two Johns ran on until they actually touched her, and her husband tried to meet her with a show of his ordinary jollity.

"I am so glad you have come," she said, "I had grown anxious; you are more than twenty minutes late. Is there any war news, John? Is there any danger of the National Guard being called out?"

John, senior, put his arm about her and gently turned her round to enter the house, and did not answer. But she was not to be put off. "John, is your regiment going?"

They were just standing at the door of the cosey dining-room, and the bright light from the hanging lamp over the inviting tea table shone full in their faces. He bent down and kissed her, saying nothing. Her face grew deadly white: "John, are *you* going?" He silently kissed her again. Poor Jack saw her sway backward slightly and her hold on the

baby relax. Her husband caught the little one quickly and said in a tone of distress, "Don't, Mary; don't, dear, I cannot bear it." She turned her face against his breast; he knew she was gathering her strength. A gentle motion of the baby called his attention to Jack, who was holding out his arms to take her.

"Let me take Flossy, father," he said; and lifting her higher than his head to make her laugh, he took her into the kitchen and sat down beside the window where the cat lay asleep on the ledge. Poor Jack! he felt his service had begun.

The side door opened and a little girl about seven years old came running in. "Mamma, mamma!" she called, "where's papa? it is ever so late."

"Mother is in the dining-room, Dolly, and father too. Stay here with me until she calls."

"I want to see papa," persisted the child; "and I am hungry, too."

"Yes, Dolly, I suppose you are, but just

wait a minute. We will be called before long. See puss — she has gone to sleep with her ball between her paws.” Dolly’s reluctant attention was slowly given to the cat, but to Jack’s relief his mother appeared and began to take the warm dishes, which were waiting by the fire, into the dining-room. Dolly ran after her and mounted quickly to her father’s knee, while Jack installed the baby in her usual chair-of-state at meal times, which was her wagon drawn up close beside the table, where she could safely rest among her pillows, under her mother’s eye.

Radiant cleanliness, delicate taste and delightful comfort surrounded them as they gathered about the tempting table. Many a wealthy home would have suffered by comparison ; yet, except for the weekly aid of a charwoman, and for the loving forethought of her husband, the whole result was won by the little wife’s own hands.

Such good times as they always had at this

evening meal — such happy talks, and when the meal was ended, such a pretty picture as they made, while with upturned sleeves and many a graceful turn of her white arms and quick fingers, the dainty housewife washed her pretty china and glass, with pleasant pride in her possessions, her husband often reading from the evening paper scraps of the daily news, though not too absorbed to admire her dexterous touch as she set all in order, before carrying her little girls to bed. Dolly had also her small share in making everything pleasant at this “comfort-time,” at the close of the day, and became an ingenious nurse to imperious Baby Floss. When rolling the wagon, and shaking rattles did no good, she would sometimes lay her own head on baby’s pillow and let the chubby fingers do their will with her long curls.

To-night no merry chat made the repast cheerful, words came slowly, little was eaten, no conversation was attempted except by the

father and son. When the discouraging attempt at a meal was over, to his mother's great surprise Jack said : "Mammy dear, if you would trust me to get these things out of the way, I believe I could do it without breaking anything, and then you and father could take Floss upstairs and have more time to talk."

"I am afraid you could not manage it, Jack," Mrs. Brereton answered doubtfully, yet with a longing in her heart to gain the precious time.

"Just let me try," he said coaxingly ; "I will leave what I don't know how to manage on the kitchen table."

His father came behind him and laying his hands upon his shoulders conveyed his approbation by his loving touch, and Jack, leaning for half a minute against his father's broad strong chest, threw back his head, looked up, and tried to smile, but their eyes said too much to each other and both soldiers felt their courage failing fast. Hastily turning away and leaving him, Mr. Brereton lifted Dolly in

his arms and said : " Come, Molly, let us see how much of a housekeeper Jack is ; bring Baby and we will go upstairs."

It was not long before Dolly's sleepy head was safe upon her pillow and then in the half-lighted room, the mother gathered little Flossy close to her breast and while she rocked her to sleep, she chanted to a drowsy tune what she wanted to say to her husband. This was a habit of long standing, for the words mattered not to Baby, so long as she heard the tune she had listened to since first she knew anything. With nods and gestures the father answered as was his wont. Ah ! how many laughing hours they had spent thus. To-night to the briefest questions, two or three grave inclinations of his head gave answer.

"How long will you be gone?" sang the sad chant. Three lifted fingers responded.

"Do you leave New York to-morrow?"

He nodded "yes."

Soon Flossy's ears were sealed by sleep and

then they were free to make what use they might of this last evening.

All was made plain ; Mr. Robson's angry dismissal, the scanty nature of their remaining resources, the reasons why he must go. Mrs. Brereton accepted all with full trust in his judgment, and no dissenting word marred the tender peace of that never-to-be-forgotten night. We will leave them together, and go and see how Jack contrived to perform his new duties.

It was not wholly new work ; he had always been ready to "help mother," and had seen his father, who was his ideal of a manly man, ever ready to lighten household cares, so he proceeded very systematically and except for one alarming moment when he thought he was going to spill all the milk in the pitcher, he had no mishaps. He tried to whistle and was not as quiet as he might have been, for noise took away the queer sensation he had of being in some way, in a bad, unending dream.

In an hour the dining-room looked very orderly ; the kitchen it is true showed signs of being used as an overflow and did not bear the imprint of Mrs. Brereton's dainty tidiness, but Jack felt he had done his best, and tried next to remember all his father's duties. The cellar was locked, the water pails filled, the coal and wood brought up for the morning. When Jack could think of nothing more he sat down in his mother's rocking-chair and tried to consider the future. To say the strict truth his heart and courage failed at the dark path he saw before him and when by and by his father came downstairs, he started at the sound of his footsteps as if ashamed of his thoughts.

There was an expression of lofty courage in Mr. Brereton's face which was a lesson in itself ; Jack felt its influence immediately.

He stepped quickly into the kitchen, and came back smiling : " Well done, Private Brereton, you have begun finely ! Marching soldier and Home Guard both will have enough

to do, I fancy ; but it makes me more comfortable to see how you take hold of your duties. Your mother says I may take you to New York with me to-morrow and you can see the regiment begin the march. It will be something for you to remember."

"O, father ! can I really go?"

"I see no reason why not. Mr. Paxson told me as we came up in the cars that he would come to the armory to see us off and you could come home with him."

"But mother? Do you think we could leave her alone? It will be awfully hard for her after you are gone. I guess I better not go, daddy."

"It was her proposition, Jack. I will go and ask Mrs. Paxson to come and spend the day. We both wish you to go, for although what is being done now does not seem wonderful, because we ourselves are the actors, yet some day histories will be written and tell of the marching of the first volunteers, and you can

say, 'I saw them go, and my father was among them.'"

The man's tall figure looked yet taller and his face was splendid with heroic enthusiasm. It did Jack a world of good to see and hear him; he was beginning to be proud that his father was a soldier.

"We must be up early, so you best go to bed; kiss mother and hurry off. I will see you again before you are asleep; I shall have to sit up late to write."

Jack found his mother selecting some underclothes and making a little pile of needful things ready for packing. "Thank you, Jack," she said, "I had a nice time to talk with father. He told you you could go to New York with him to-morrow?"

Jack tried to take his mother's quiet tone, but he could not restrain himself as he looked at the scanty collection of absolute necessities which was all a soldier could allow himself, and he flung his young arms around her and

almost sobbing, said : " O, mother ! how can we let father go ? "

For a moment she lost the reins of her self-control, but in a breath again had them. " We are not only going to let him go, Jack, but make it as easy as we can for him, and not distress him with our tears. You must tell me just how he looks in his uniform and watch everything and listen to everything, so I can understand just how it all was, and then we will try to grow and be as brave as he is. "

" Yes, mother, " said Jack, ashamed of his outburst.

" Now go and get all the sleep you can. Good-night. " Afraid of weakening him, she let him go without an added kiss.

Just as he knelt, Jack heard his father come into his little room and kneel down beside him. Neither made a sound, but when the lad's short prayer was ended, his father knelt on for a moment longer and then he took him in his arms, as he used to do when Jack was a little

fellow, and kissed him, and said: "Every night, Jack, you will ask God to take care of your soldier-father and I will ask Him to bless my soldier-boy, and never will we be afraid of anything but of not doing our duty."

For many a long, hard day afterward, Jack took these words as his "fighting orders."

II.

GONE.

ONLY Floss and Dolly slept much that night. Jack looked with loving scrutiny at his parents and he doubted if they had tried to go to bed at all. His mother's face was white, and greatly changed; his father looked perceptibly older and had deep lines around his pleasant brown eyes.

No disorder marred his mother's always neat dress and her pretty hair was smooth and glossy as usual, but there was something hitherto wholly unknown to him in her strange expression.

It seemed strange and even incongruous to Jack's excited perceptions that the house and everything in it looked as it always did and that breakfast had to be prepared as usual. It almost seemed strange that the sun shone and

the bluebirds sang, "when father was going away to the war."

Mrs. Brereton said little, but moved quickly about, brought down to the dining-room the small bag which held all her soldier would be allowed to carry, and handled over and over again everything he was to wear that day, as if to keep doing some last thing for his comfort. Mr. Brereton returned from his brief farewell visits to his nearest neighbors; he tried to eat his breakfast; he made what seemed an aimless visit to the chicken-house and brought in two or three fresh eggs, and seemed to be trying to convince himself that it could not be true that in half an hour he was to bring all his wonted habits to an end, and at last without a word kissed the little girls, gave Jack his bag and made a gesture toward the gate, which the boy understood, and then with a pain no words can measure he took his speechless wife in his arms, kissed her brave, tearless face and without looking back,

ran rapidly after his boy. Jack, facing the house, could see his mother quickly shut the door, and something he could not have explained, kept him from looking at his father's face until after they were seated in the car.

As his uniform was at the armory in town and he wore no outward sign of being a soldier, but few saw anything peculiar about him, except that he looked ill and stern. Farther down the road the newsboys came in with the morning papers and the excitement they brought, with all the details of alarm and skirmish, of mustering in of men and hurrying to the front, gave great relief to his half-stupefied mind. In the stillness of the fresh April morning, coming out of his orderly home, it had all seemed like some horrid spell which was stifling him; this first contact with the outside world which at this time and in that place, seemed to have but one reality, one thought, one purpose—the entering into war—took away the wretched sense of individual misfortune and

made him again one of the great multitude of patriots.

No other topic was discussed, no other events claimed attention, and as their short journey to New York drew near its end, acquaintances and friends came through the train to bid Mr. Brereton good-by. The morning papers had announced the departure of his regiment and he was almost overwhelmed by the warm and heartfelt words and the silent but equally expressive hand-grasps of his friends, as they each bade him farewell. Jack's eyes shone with excitement and he drank in every syllable of cordial good-will, and grew very proud as he saw his father's evident popularity.

"Your boy, Brereton?"

"Yes; my only boy."

"Want to go too?"

To his father's surprise, Jack replied with unmistakable emphasis: "Yes, sir."

"Well, maybe they will take you into the drum corps," said the gentleman, smiling.

"He is mustered in as a Home Guard," said Mr. Brereton, laying his hand on Jack's shoulder; "he will be the only man at home until I get back. His duty will not be a light one."

The gentleman's smile faded as Mr Brereton said this, though he had answered in a gay tone: "Keep a sharp lookout, my lad, and if you need reinforcements send for me." They all laughed a little as he said this and shook hands with Jack at parting, but there was something so sincere and cordial in his tone and face, that as they left the car, the boy asked his father who the gentleman was.

"Why, I thought you knew him, Jack; that's Mr. Christopher Roberts, a famous lawyer from Glenville, and if any trouble comes, you may take him at his word and ask his advice without hesitation. He is an old friend, a true one. Don't forget the name, Christopher Roberts."

"I'll remember. I never saw any one with such a nice face; he made me think of you."

Their first visit in the city was to Mr. Rob-

son's office, where Brereton drew his half-month's salary, put the money in an envelope and pinned it in Jack's vest pocket. Mr. Robson was at first cold and even rough in language and manner, but when he turned to bid adieu the selfishness died in the old man's heart and he spoke with real regret: "Come back safe, Brereton, and come back here; we can't give you up, even if you are such a fool as to go off in this mad way. Remember, I did my best to dissuade you."

Then they went to the armory, and there Jack almost forgot to be sorry and shared the excitement and enthusiasm with which he was surrounded.

Brereton was a private in Company A, and going directly to his company room, he changed his citizen's dress for his uniform, transferred the contents of his little bag to his knapsack, made a great parcel of what he had to leave behind, which he gave into Jack's care, and was ready for what might come.

Every moment brought something of fresh interest. By companies the men were provided with blankets, canteens and cartridge belts and each received a tin cup and plate. When fully dressed and equipped, Jack hardly knew his father: the man of business was gone and he looked a soldier every inch.

By and by the time of departure drew near and Mr. Paxson made his appearance but passed his friend without recognizing him among the hundreds of uniformed men. Jack had to call to him before he could see them. Then there came a wrench hard and brief, the boy drew back with Mr. Paxson, his father fell into place in the ranks of his company, and they were parted from each other.

The drums beat "the assembly," the vaulted roof echoed, the windows rattled and reverberated, the "markers" set the alignment. "Forward, march!" and "Company A" took its place of honor, on the right of the line, and Jack's father was beyond recall.

Still the drums thrilled the boy's heart, and his eyes, though dim, shed no tears, and though his throat ached and swelled with emotion, no sob escaped his lips, and his young feet kept the rhythm of the music, as his father's did.

The adjutant presented the regiment to the colonel; the band struck up "The Girl I Left Behind Me"; the colonel's strong voice rose above all the din: "Battalion, right face! forward, march!" and the regiment filed out into the wide street, where a dense crowd hailed them with wild cheers and waving handkerchiefs.

"By companies into line; march!" rang out from the head of the column, and like a many-voiced echo the words came from each succeeding captain in their order of advance, and with a swinging stride they passed rapidly out of sight down the great thoroughfare, a strong, untried, yet wholly trustworthy body of brave men, a fit offering to a country whose bulwark is her free sons.

The standing crowd followed on as they

could, and Jack, carrying his big parcel and his father's bag, darted off unmindful of Mr. Paxson, and that very staid and quiet gentleman had to run as he had not done for many a year, to keep him in sight. On reaching Broadway, new crowds stopped the way, the police pressing them back to give the regiment space to move freely, the baggage wagons closed in the rear, and there was nothing for Jack to see but the points of bayonets glittering in the sun, and nothing to hear but the beat of drums and notes of music made unmeaning by distance and drowned by the cheers of the people and the roll of the wagons.

Then he recalled poor Mr. Paxson and was delighted to see him not far off.

Mr. Paxson had too true an understanding of the case, was too glad to have only eager excitement instead of tears and despair to encounter, to feel at all annoyed. He insisted upon taking Jack's bag and left him the big bundle of his father's clothes, which he clung

to and which he would have insisted upon carrying were it twice as heavy, and they turned their faces homeward.

Slowly the fire died out of the boy's eyes, the color from his cheeks; the strange rattling of the drums within the armory still reverberated in his ears, but every passing moment robbed him of enthusiasm and made it more plain that his father had gone, and that he was going back to a sad and lonely home.

Mr. Paxson tried to talk cheerfully and bought him the evening papers, but both soon fell into absorbing thoughts and said little. A gentleman passing through the car, who did not know Jack, stopped at their seat: "Did you see the boys off?"

"Yes; I am just now returning from the armory. They started out in splendid form; I declare, I felt like shouldering a musket and going myself!"

"Any of your own people in the regiment?"

"Only my neighbor, John Brereton, but we

are so fond of him in Ruremont, that it seems as if a member had been taken from every family in the village."

"Oh! he is that bright handsome fellow with such a hearty, contagious laugh. I don't wonder! It is a pretty severe affair, this three months' service, on some of those young men; in some cases they lose their positions by it. Brereton is one of Robson's head men, is he not?"

"He was his general manager."

"Was, you say; would they not give him leave of absence?"

"No; they made it a point of issue, and his place is gone."

"That's hard, and he is a married man too. Are his family provided for? I remember once seeing a very pretty woman with him who was evidently his wife. Has she anything to depend upon?"

"This is Brereton's only son," said Mr. Paxson, anxious as to the effect on Jack of what

might next be said. "This is Mr. Thornton of Thornhill, Jack."

"You must excuse me, my boy, for speaking so freely of your father and mother, but of course I did not know who you were. You look as if my last question was answered; she has a good boy to depend upon."

Jack blushed, but managed to say he would do his best, and that his father would be back in July.

"I hope so," said Mr. Thornton, "with all my heart!" And then in a lower voice, to Mr. Paxson: "If there is need of help, let me know."

Jack felt puzzled over various things he had heard during the day. That people were sorry for him was quite plain — that he was not surprised at; but a word here and there, not intended for him, had reached his ears and he clearly made out they feared more for him than he did for himself.

Almost as Mr. Thornton ceased speaking,

they were at Ruremont Station, and Mr. Paxson told Jack that as Mrs. Paxson was still with his mother he would walk home with him.

As they drew near the house the boy grew more and more nervous and actually dreaded to meet his mother. Would she wear that strange, white look that had made her seem so unnatural in the morning? Would she cry when she saw him? As to seeing her first, with other persons about them, he could not do it. Leaving Mr. Paxson to go to the front door he ran around to the back of the house and made his way to the kitchen.

When he found himself in the clean, bright room, where the kettle sung cheerily on the shining stove, he stood still, wondering why it had been so impossible to go in with Mr. Paxson, yet perversely unwilling to join them in the next room where he could plainly hear their voices. But in a very few moments, Mrs. Paxson with her bonnet on, having been watching for her husband, they left ; and almost im-

mediately Jack heard his mother's light footsteps coming. Instinctively he laid the bundle of his father's clothes a little out of sight and braced himself to be brave.

"Well, mother," he said, "here I am." He could not see his own white cheeks, nor guess how little his effort concealed his agitation.

His mother read him like an open book and did not come too near him, nor kiss him. "Are you all right, dear? Have you had anything to eat? Better run up and get off your best clothes before tea, for you have several things to do outside."

They understood each other perfectly, these two, and he took up his bundle unquestioned, and was off for his room on the instant. He did not lose many minutes in making the needful change, and was down again before his mother expected him.

When he came back, Flossy was tied in a chair by the fire and Dolly was amusing her. The cloth was laid upon a table in the kitchen

and Mrs. Brereton was bringing out some china from the dining-room. "We will take tea in here to-night, Jack; see if you can find some eggs in the hen-house; the water is boiling."

What a comfortable thought for them both, to escape that dining-room which was always made to shine again for his father, and to get away from those front windows from which the children always had watched so eagerly for his coming. Jack's courage was reassured — his mother and he could manage.

The eggs were found, the chickens fed, the outhouses locked; Jack peeped in at the kitchen door. Yes, he would have time! He ran swiftly down to the outer gate and stood for a minute where he had been "mustered in" last night. From this time forth he never missed this brief visit for many a night to come: it was his "good-night" to his father, his report to his commanding officer.

Back he came, and this time he wore a natural expression on his face and had some color

in his round cheeks. He had eaten nothing but a biscuit since his light breakfast in the morning, for although lunch had been offered in the armory, he could not eat, and now the hunger of a growing boy asserted itself despite his sorrow and gave zest to the plain meal which Jack noticed consisted only of barely necessary food.

It was sadly easy to put away the few things they had used, for ordinarily Mrs. Brereton made the table as bright and pretty as possible, and spared no pains to give variety and delicacy to her husband's meals, nor grudged the greatly added labor which all the tempting prettiness involved for her.

Jack bustled about helping, and then the little girls were carried upstairs and put to sleep and he took that time to see that everything was safe for night and ready for morning. Then he went into the cosey parlor and sat down before the small fire, which was pleasant in the chilly April evening and waited for his mother.

It seemed longer than usual before the children slept, but when they were really quiet and safe, his mother came gently down the stairs and drawing a chair beside him, said softly: "Now, tell me what you saw and what father said."

Once launched on the story of his day, his spirit kindled with the remembrance and he told it well, and his mother's warm heart caught the fire of enthusiasm which had roused him so thoroughly. For the first time a gleam of pride added strength to her patient sense of duty, and courage drawn from her boy's glowing face and words, made her feel ready to give her costly offering to her country, and to take up the burden of guarding the little home-kingdom until their soldier should return.

Hers was a strange-looking battlefield, with its pretty cottage and garden, and fast green-
ing lawn, peopled only with her little ones, but she knew it was to be a spot of stern conflict, and hard struggles.

“O, Jack ! it must have been splendid ! Did the crowd cheer loudly ?”

“You never heard anything like it ; it was perfectly tremendous ; you could hear the cheers increasing all the time as they went on down Broadway. I think it must have sounded as if one big ‘hurrah’ began at the armory and never stopped until they did.”

Suddenly Jack jumped up : “Well, I am a great fellow,” he said, “there is your money pinned in my vest pocket upstairs, and I never thought of it. That’s a fine beginning !”

He was up and down again in no time and put the envelope in his mother’s hand. Mrs. Brereton counted the money slowly and sat for a few minutes with the bank-notes in her hand. “Eighty-five dollars, Jack ! It is not much, dear, to depend on for three months.”

“O, but, mother ! there is one hundred and fifty in the bank, father said, and Mr. Robson’s last words were, to come right back to them when his time of service expired.”

“If, by any possible means, we can leave that money in the bank, there it must stay, Jack. Let mother tell you what she thinks, for we are partners now and father said I was to take you into all my councils. Suppose” — the words came slowly and were hard to say — “suppose your father was wounded, or in any way injured; suppose he was ill and had to come home unfit for work; suppose” — her face grew deadly white and she stopped. “I have supposed enough,” she continued; “that one hundred and fifty dollars is all we have to go to him, to spend for him, to bring him home, to send him comforts, or do for him anything he might need. It is all we have for any emergency; if illness came to us here at home, it is all! Instead of taking that money out of the bank, I want to add to it; we will put our heads together and see if we cannot make that fund a little larger, so that if he is ill or in any way helpless, there will be something more for him to depend on and for us if distress comes.”

Jack's horizon was widening painfully; many things grew plain to him which he had not seen before. "It does not seem as if much could happen in three months, does it, mammy dear? We will not need much to live on, because you and I don't care so very much for nice things to eat"—Jack came as near the truth as he could—"and the girls hardly eat anything, and the warm weather is coming and we won't want so much coal. I think we will get on without much trouble."

All at once his father's serious warning came back to his mind. "But, mother, he charged me to see that you did not stint yourself; I promised to remind you that he was worried about that. You will mind what he said, won't you?"

"We will have enough, son, but we won't grumble if it is only enough, will we?"

"Oh! I am 'mustered in' as a regular soldier, and I can't grumble, you know; that would never do."

"What do you mean, my son?"

“Didn’t father tell you? Why, I am a three months’ man, too, and my post is here; father, the night before he went away, put me on duty here, as a Home Guard; I made a solemn promise, and everything, just as soldiers do.”

“Well,” said his mother, almost ready to smile at his earnestness, “I am thankful to have such a soldier to protect me, and now let us put out the lights and go to bed. I did not sleep at all, last night.”

There was no light in the dining-room. “I think we will never light that lamp over the dining-table until father comes back; what do you say, Jack?”

“Nor have a meal in here, nor let any one sit in father’s chair: that is what I would like!”

“So let it be, Jack; we will keep all those things for him.”

When they went upstairs Mrs. Brereton found the door open between Jack’s room and hers: “Let me leave it so, mother,” said the plucky boy; “you will feel as if I was nearer

to you than if the door was shut, and you might want something in the night."

Mrs. Brereton looked at him with overflowing eyes.

Jack had not spent many wakeful hours in the fourteen healthful years of his young life, and it was a novel sensation to toss about upon his comfortable little bed, unable to sleep. But the drum-beat and the splendid rhythm of the martial music was in his ears, and the day lived itself over and over again in his memory, and his pillow grew hot and uncomfortable and his cheeks burned, and his eyelids would not stay closed. Then he began to ponder on what his mother had said and he saw more and more plainly that this three months' service might be but an open door to many changes of which he could not bear to think, even for a minute. Suppose his father was wounded, suppose — Jack could stay in bed no longer, but jumped out and went softly into his mother's room and looked first at his quiet, rosy little sisters in

their deep sleep, and then stole over to his mother's side.

The faint light of the night-taper fell on her sweet face and her eyes opened at once, and he felt sure that she, too, had as yet been unable to sleep. She held out her arms: "Can't you sleep, dear? What is the matter?"

"I wanted to see if you and the girls were all right."

"On guard? Well, it is comfortable to have a soldier so near, but every sentinel has his time of relief, and you must sleep now to keep strong."

She held him tightly to her breast and he could feel the quick beating of her heart, but she did not lose her self-control. He went back soothed and in some way freed from his worst restlessness. His pillow had grown cool, and slowly he fell asleep, planning impossible ways of making money.

III.

AN UNEXPECTED WAY TO MAKE MONEY.

JACK awoke with a confused idea of something being wrong and requiring attention, and gradually found out that yesterday was not a dream but a real experience ; that he had slept later than usual, and to his mortification found his mother's bed vacant and knew that she had begun the day alone.

He hurried to the extent of neglecting some things that he was usually very careful about and ran downstairs full of regret, to find the house open, and the kitchen fire which his father always lighted, already brightly burning and the table laid for breakfast.

“Mother, why didn't you call me ? I am so sorry !”

“You looked so tired, dear, and had been

awake so late, I had not the heart to rouse you. There was very little to do, and no reason to hurry." Mrs. Brereton's voice broke into a little dry sob.

"Oh! but, mother, you had to come down alone. What would father say?"

He bustled about and tried to find things to do and felt more comfortable after he had swept the front veranda and the path to the gate. "Do you want me to go to school, mother?" he said, as he hung up the broom.

"Yes, certainly, son. Why not?"

"Oh! I don't know," he said, embarrassed by his mother's tone of surprise; "I thought you might want me for something, and besides I would like to leave school if I could find any work that would bring you a little money."

His mother gave his curly head a tender caress, and she smiled a little sad smile, but she said: "I don't see the way clear for that yet, Jack, but I tell you what you can do for me; take this note to the rectory and stop for

the answer when you come back from school. I think Mrs. Dorrance may have some sewing to give me, for she has a great many orders for fine work from ladies in New York."

Jack was troubled and could not tell what to do; he felt sure his father would have objected to this plan, and remembered that this work usually went into the hands of very poor people for whom his mother had often done little kindnesses and he felt like discussing the matter, but he saw such a calm, steadfast face looking lovingly at him, and eyes so full of determination, that he said nothing. He remembered that money must be made somehow, and he took the note with his books and started off for school very much "out of heart." He had to be excused from his lessons, for he had not even tried to learn them; he had to go alone when he had always walked as far as the station with his father, and he had to leave his mother to her own sad thoughts until afternoon, and he was dissatisfied because of his having fallen

short of his promise on the very first day, and Jack liked none of these things.

Once at school, however, he became the hero of the day; the boys made him tell every minute particular about the regiment and the armory, and looked upon him as a most enviable fellow, and even Mr. Holtin, the head master, called him up to his desk and inquired most kindly about his father and mother, and was peculiarly kind to him all day.

Just before dismissing school, Mr. Holtin said: "Boys, if any of you know any poor lad who would like to earn a couple of dollars a week by keeping the sidewalk and grounds about my house in order, I wish you would send him to me. He must be a decent, trustworthy boy and one old enough to do the work well."

The blood rushed into Jack's face and head, his ears tingled and burned, and he did not quite like being set down as a "decent boy," but he wanted that job. Getting rid of his

comrades by saying that he had to stop at the rectory for his mother, he went to Mr. Holtin, just as he was locking up his desk, and said awkwardly, "Mr. Holtin, would I do for the boy you spoke of to take care of your sidewalk and paths?"

"You, Jack? Why, I was thinking of some of our poor neighbors who needed a little help. What made you think of it? I doubt if your parents would like it."

Jack was in deep water, but he pulled himself together: "Father lost his position, when he went with his regiment, and our new house has taken almost all he had put away, and mother is afraid that he might need the little we have left, if he was sick or anything, and we are going to earn some money, if we can, and I think I ought to take this if I suit you."

Mr. Holtin laid a hand on either shoulder of the sinewy, erect young figure and looked into his earnest eyes and said very gently:

"Have it and welcome, Jack, but there is a good deal of work to be done for the money."

"It is eight dollars a month, and father only gets thirteen for his pay as a soldier."

"It strikes me that you are somewhat of a soldier yourself, Jack; you don't shirk duty."

"I would like to be one, and I am a sort of Home Guard, for father regularly mustered me in, to mother's service, before he went away," said Jack, smiling.

"Well, my boy, I think cleaning my yard is a good deal like attacking a fortification for you, or will be, when the boys begin to wonder about it, and the difficulties show themselves."

"Oh! I think I can stand what the fellows say, if they don't make me too angry. What is the best time for me to commence?"

"From half-past seven to nine o'clock in the morning ought to be enough time, I should think, except on Saturdays when there is more to be done, and then I am afraid I shall have to keep you until nearly noon."

"That would suit me nicely, thank you, sir, for then I would have my afternoons to keep things tidy at home, and if I can do it all as you like to have it done, won't you please let me know, if you hear of any one else who wants a boy for little odd jobs? Father taught me how to do a good many things. I know how to take good care of chickens."

"You deserve to be successful, Jack, and I will gladly do all I can to help you, but don't forget the school work; keep that well in hand; you must not lose your grade in your class."

"All right, sir, I'll study in the evenings. I shall have to sit up later now, to keep mother company," said Jack.

"Good-by, then, until to-morrow morning," said Mr. Holtin, shaking his hand warmly. "I shall look out for you about half-past seven."

Jack was full of delight at this immediate and unlooked-for opportunity, and this personal experience made him take quite a different view of his mother's application at the

rectory, and he had great satisfaction in receiving from Mrs. Dorrance a small parcel which evidently contained work. Money making would begin at once.

He bounded into the kitchen door and put his arm about his mother's neck. "Halloo! mammy dear, I have great news for you."

Mrs. Brereton turned with painful haste: "From your father?"

Poor Jack repented his hasty eagerness: "O, no, mother! we could not have any news yet. I am sorry I did not think before I spoke, I only wanted to tell you that I have found some work. Would two dollars a week be of any help to you?"

"Of course, Jack, it would be of great service; it ought to go a long way toward paying the butcher's bill."

"Well, that would be 'bully,' if I could do that. I am sure of the work if I keep well. I am going to keep Mr. Holtin's paths clean and do a lot of those sorts of things every morning."

"How did Mr. Holtin come to offer it to you?"

"He didn't. He only asked us to send him a 'decent boy,' who could attend to the grounds, and I felt like shouting out, like the Irishman father laughs about, and saying: 'Oime him, sor.' But I waited until the boys were gone and asked for it and he gave it to me. At first he thought you might object, but I told him that we wanted to save all the money we could for father, and then he said, 'All right.' It was no harm to tell him that much, mother, was it?"

Mrs. Brereton could not but be cheered by his jolly face and his unselfish eagerness to find work without regard to his own labor or personal annoyance. "This is an unlooked-for piece of good luck, Jack, and I am sure you will do the work well. Father was always very proud of the way in which you kept our own walks. You were quite right, too, to tell Mr. Holtin."

Jack was delighted. "And, oh! here is your answer from Mrs. Dorrance. Is it what you wanted?"

Mrs. Brereton opened the parcel and found a child's flannel skirt to embroider. "Yes, Jack; it is a good thing to get something right away, and it will bring two dollars when it is done, but it will take most of my spare time for a week, so you will probably bring as much to the family fund as I will. Now bring Dolly in from the garden and let us have our dinner."

Fried hominy and apple sauce, and bread and butter and milk, and a slice of cold beef. Jack's hunger was keen, the odor of the delicate brown hominy was very enticing, the maple syrup made a pale golden glory, in which the brown islands rested temptingly, and he pronounced it a "dinner fit for a king."

Toward the close of the afternoon both mother and son became restless. No one to watch for, no pleasant evening to look forward

to, no inviting table to spread and make ready. Jack finished all his work, that which was really needful, and that which he created for himself, in his desire to keep busy and be useful. He did not feel willing to leave his mother alone and run off in search of a playmate, so he had nothing left to do but to fidget aimlessly about, in and out of the house every ten minutes. He had taken Flossy out in her wagon, and had a little fun with Dolly, and cleaned out the nests in the hen house, and put in fresh hay, and he could think of nothing else to do.

“Mother,” he said at last, “might I go down to the station and see the train come in and get a newspaper?”

“Yes, Jack; I want the *Evening Post*, very much. I would subscribe for it, only that we can always have Mr. Paxson’s the next morning, and it is one of the small expenses that help to make a large whole. I am so anxious to-night, however, that I think we must indulge ourselves.”

"I have a quarter father gave me yesterday ; I'll use that for papers as long as it lasts."

It was a comfort to have something to do, and he ran off as fast as a very lively pair of legs would carry him. He was too early for the train his father had been accustomed to take, and he walked up and down the road at the head of the steps, half-sorry now that he had come, since it proved so dreary not to have any one to meet.

A gentleman drove up to the station and asked when the up-train was due. Jack answered promptly : " Six-ten, sir." He knew the hour well.

" Then I have twenty minutes to spare ; could you hold my horse ? I want to speak to the baggage-master, who is down by the track. Do you know how to drive ? "

" No, sir, I don't."

" Did you never drive at all ? "

" Once in a great while father would let me have the reins, if he took me for a drive, but I

don't know anything about it. We never had a horse of our own."

The gentleman seemed disappointed and looked about for some one else, but the few loiterers had gone down the steps to be nearer the track and Jack and he were all alone.

"My horse is very gentle," he said, "and I would very much like to get down there and see if the baggage-master has a box I am looking for; would you be afraid to hold her? I won't stay five minutes, and will be up long before the train comes through. The only thing that can scare her, is a locomotive whistle. Jump in and take the reins a minute and let me see how you can handle them."

Jack did not like the situation, but the pretty horse seemed as gentle and easy to manage as a kitten and he did not like that word "afraid." He sprang lightly into the phaeton and took the offered reins. "Drive on a little way," said the gentleman. "Get on, Rose!"

The obedient animal trotted quickly forward,

and her delicate mouth gave Jack no sense of strain upon his arms. "Now turn," said the owner.

With great care and some anxiety, Jack accomplished the feat. "Oh! you'll do very well, very well indeed; she'll give you no trouble; you just walk her up and down here and I'll be back before you know it." And waiting for no further parleying, he said, "Whoa, Rose," and jumped out of the vehicle as nimbly as the boy himself could have done.

Two or three of the allotted five minutes had passed and Jack had grown accustomed to his position, and the horse had evidently accepted the order of things, and almost turned of her own free will when she reached the place where Jack had succeeded in bringing her round, when suddenly the vibration of the ground, and the unmistakable dull thunder of an approaching train struck the senses of both Jack and his charge.

Jack tightened his grasp upon the reins and

said a soothing "Whoa, Rose, whoa," but his voice was a strange one to the sensitive beast, and she paid no heed to it. With a wild shriek of warning, an "extra" train dashed through the deep cut below them, and instantly rearing to her full height, the poor horse seemed to Jack's startled eyes to stand upright before him. She pawed madly in the air and then "bolted" violently down the road.

Unfortunately the way before them lay, for full half a mile, directly down hill and every instant his speed increased. The cries of people on the road and the senseless efforts of foot passengers, now on their way to the station, to stop their progress, only added to the terror of the high bred horse, and the danger increased with every second. One thing alone helped him; the stage driver's direction to "keep cool and try to hold the right of the road." He shouted this advice in such a clear and cheery voice, that Jack heard and tried to heed him.

With a thought sent upward to God for help,



SHE PAWED MADLY IN THE AIR AND THEN "BOLTED" VIOLENTLY DOWN THE ROAD.

a wordless appeal from his heart to the mercy of Heaven, Jack strove to keep his wits about him, or rather to recall some of his startled ideas to his frightened mind. He instinctively wound the reins about his boyish hands and tried to look straight ahead and hold an even, steady course.

Madder and madder grew the pace ; even if he could have turned his head, he would hardly have been able to recognize the places he passed with such amazing speed. He heard his name once or twice as they tore through the wide village streets : " It's Jack Brereton ! Hold on, Jack ! " That was all he heard out of the medley of voices.

He seemed to be fast leaving all he knew behind him, he could not keep his seat and his arms seemed straining away from their sockets. He braced his feet against the dash-board and held on.

Vehicles drew away on either side and mercifully the road was straight, and the horse did

not show any tendency to swerve. All at once it flashed into the boy's mind, his first really intelligent idea: "She is trotting like a race horse; she goes as if she was used to it; it's different from the way we started." This was the actual truth, for our poor Jack was driving one of the most famous trotting horses in the country, and it was due to her good sense and training that she had held the road, and now that her fright had partially passed away, and no recurring noise disturbed her, she began to fancy she was speeding on a track and was out-doing her record in fine style. Slowly Jack's wits came back also, and as his fears grew less, he found a sort of breathless and terrible pleasure in his flying speed.

The town was now a mile behind, and they had reached the foot of "Miner's Hill," the ascent of which was the dread of every heavily-laden team. "Perhaps here the horse might slacken her pace?" Jack's hopes began to rise. They struck the first few feet of the

long steep grade, and, God be thanked, there was a change!

By no possibility could this be a track; hills like this were never found there. Perhaps the bright-witted creature thought she had won her race, at any rate, she stopped almost as suddenly as she had started.

Jack loosened his clinched fingers and dropped his tired legs from the dash-board, and spoke to her. She turned her foam-covered neck and looked at him; he caught the idea that she wanted petting and leaned forward and patted her quivering flank, and said, "Poor Rose, poor Rose," as he would have done to a tired child. She seemed satisfied and stood with her head down drawing heavy breaths.

They could hardly turn where they were, Jack feared, and the hill was a hard climb for the tired beast. His safety after such a wild drive, however, gave him courage; he would try to turn where he then was. He got out

and went to her head and stroked her wet face and she perceptibly leaned against him as if pleased.

“Poor Rose,” he said, “it won’t do to stand still here, we’ll have to turn round,” and taking her by the bridle he gently turned the phaeton, trying to imitate what he had seen done, and succeeded without any imminent risk of an overturn, and at last Rose’s head again pointed homeward. He took his handkerchief and then his soft cap and wiped off the foam about her eyes, and resuming his seat, took the reins up gently.

“Get on, Rose,” he said encouragingly, and she fell into a long, slow striding walk, which carried them over the ground at some speed, though she never hastened her step. Doubtless she thought it was a long way to the paddock, but her driver had the good sense not to try to influence her pace, and only repeated from time to time a cheery “Get on, Rose,” to keep up her courage.

As he came near the village, he saw many people coming toward him, and soon made out that they were looking for him, and passing through the little crowd, at a smart trot, came a horse and buggy, in which sat Rose's owner.

In a minute more he was beside Jack, and springing out said in the heartiest tone of joyful thanksgiving: "All safe, by everything that's good! And you, youngster, whoever you are, have pluck and coolness enough to carry you through the world safely, I can tell you that, surely." This is 'Rose Deories,' the great trotter, you are driving, and no man will ever take a faster drive than you have had this afternoon, while you live. How did you turn? Did you strike anything?" He caressed and stroked the hot, full-veined sides of his pet, asking questions every moment. "Who stopped her?" He did not wait for answers, but moved from side to side examining horse and wagon as rapidly as he talked.

"Nothing is hurt! All as safe and tight as possible!" he exclaimed exultingly.

The outcoming villagers gathered around the two wagons. "Whose boy is this?" he said.

"Mrs. Brereton's," said many voices. "His father went to the war yesterday."

Jack sat still, feeling a little giddy, and now that he had no responsibility to strengthen his nerves, becoming very limp.

"Where's your cap, Jack?" asked a friendly voice.

"I took it to wipe off Rose's face," he said, half-ashamed of the confession; "her eyes were all covered with foam, and my handkerchief got wet through in a minute."

"Good boy!" said Rose's master; "your mother will be proud of you some day, if you always do as well as you have done now. Do you know that if you had yelled at that horse, or struck her, or helped to frighten her by any nonsense, she and you would both have been done for? She is worth a good many thou-

sands to me, but your parents have got something better worth having. Where do you live?"

Twenty people told him at once.

"I am coming to see your mother," he said, almost affectionately, "but I've got to take Rose home now and have her attended to. Who'll drive the boy home and take this buggy to the livery stable?"

Half the crowd were ready.

Jack got out of the phaeton slowly, and when he touched the ground felt very unsteady on his legs. He walked to Rose's head and put his hand on her forehead and gently stroked her delicate face. She stretched out her neck and rested her head on his shoulder.

"By the limping Harry, she knows you drove her! She is proud of you," said the owner. "If anybody ever asks you if you can drive, tell them you drove Rose Deories in the fastest trot she ever made, and send for me to prove it."

Jack had not strength to be proud, and they had to steady him a little as he climbed into the returning buggy. The gentleman came round to shake hands with him, and said laughingly, "You have not been paid yet for holding my horse, Jack," pressing a crumpled bank-note into his hand as he held it.

"Thank you, sir," said Jack, without regard to what he was receiving.

"Can I do anything else for you?"

"I would like to see Rose again, sometime."

"And so you shall and drive her, too. Good-by." And as he moved rapidly away, Jack's buggy was moving as quickly toward home.

The man who drove, saw he was unfit to talk much and they went forward in silence until they came in sight of the station, when Jack suddenly became animated: "Oh! I wish I could get an evening paper for my mother; that's what I came down here for."

"You shall have all the papers you want, Jack. It was blamed mean in Mr. Rodney to

ask you to hold such a horse as that, but I tell you, you've made a good friend of him for all your life ; he was dead sure you would try to jump out, or drop the lines, or do some fool's trick. He ought to do something handsome by you. Why, you've got some money in your hand now. Did he give it to you ?”

Jack had scarcely noticed what he held in his damp, shaky hand. His companion leaned over and examined it. “ Why, Jack, it's a tenner ! That's pretty good to begin with. Put it in your pocket.”

Jack looked at it in astonishment ; sure enough it was a veritable ten-dollar note, and he did not care if he was a bit faint, and had ruined his cap, and heard a strange roaring in his ears, and had been run away with in the bargain. This was worth it all, and he reached the gate holding money and paper equally tight.

IV.

TIM KELLY WANTS A BOOK-KEEPER.

WHEN the buggy drove to the gate, Jack was not surprised to see his mother coming down the walk to look for him, but he was not prepared to see her suddenly turn pale and begin to run.

"All right! He's all right," called out the man who drove him.

"She is frightened to see me in a buggy."

"Yes; and then you are bareheaded and look pretty well used up," said the good-natured villager. "Mothers' eyes are sharp, I tell you."

Jack stepped to the ground as fast as he could, but it was by no means at his usual rate of speed. "Please come to the gate, Mis' Brereton," called out the driver, and she came so quickly that she met Jack just as he opened it.

"Jack's all right, ma'am, and you'd better believe he's done his best this afternoon. He's made of good stuff, Jack is. He's had a fast ride, that's all; he'll tell you all about it, Mis' Brereton." He gave Jack's hand a hearty shake and drove off.

With his arm around his mother's waist and her hand upon his shoulder, they walked slowly to the house, Jack telling his story by no means too clearly or connectedly. On the doorstep sat Dolly, hugging Flossy, with whom she had been trusted for the moment, with faithful tightness. Mrs. Brereton released her baby from the close-locked little hands, and led the way into the house.

"Where's your cap, my son?" Jack produced from his pocket what had been once a tidy head-covering, and showed a moist little lump of cloth, stiff with the frothy foam which he had wiped from Rose's eyes.

"I am sorry it is spoiled, mother dear, but I had nothing else I could use, and the poor

beast was half-blind with all that stuff running down her face; my handkerchief was hardly any use. Do you mind very much? I think this will pay for it," and he held up his pale green trophy.

"Ten dollars! Where on earth did you get that?"

"The gentleman gave it to me, when he took the horse."

"Ten dollars for taking care of a horse? My dear child, that is impossible; he must have made a mistake."

"Well, you see, mammy," said Jack, laughing, "it was not the usual way of taking care of a horse, and somehow he thought things might have been worse and he said she was worth thousands of dollars, so I am pretty sure he meant to give me something very nice, and the man who drove me home seemed to think it was all right. You see I managed to keep still and that was lucky, and I held on to the reins and that was lucky too, and he even seemed to

want to do more for me, so I am pretty sure it's all right."

Mrs. Brereton looked grave. "I am sure that you have been in serious danger, Jack, and all we can do is to be thankful you are safely out of it, and if this money is really yours, to be grateful for that also, for it will be a great help. And now, where is the paper?"

In the crowded columns, full of the mingled tangle of true and false, of which war-time "news" was always made, they at last found the name of their regiment and learned that it had embarked at the appointed time and gone down the bay in the transport provided for it.

It seemed strange to see what a small item it was, in the account of moving armies; to them, it was the only important tidings in the closely printed sheet.

"Just think, Jack, how many feel as we do, dear, and so many have gone for years, instead of months. No hope until the war is over." Jack tried to be as sorry for others as he could,

but after all his efforts, his father was the only man he knew who had gone to the fight, their regiment was the one he had seen march away, and he could not stretch his sympathies far beyond his own experiences.

After this, for a few days nothing occurred to especially affect their lives. Jack took fine care of Mr. Holtin's small grass plots and graveled walks, and bore the comments of his schoolmates in a very manly fashion. He was also busy with his own poultry, attending to his setting hens and nursing a young brood of chicks, which had ventured into the world while springtime was yet a very cool season, hardly fitted to their downy condition.

The boy's active mind was perpetually trying to think of schemes for earning money, but as yet he could find nothing practicable but his present work for Mr. Holtin. The two dollars he received on Saturday afternoon gave him great satisfaction. On this day too, his mother's beautiful needlework was delivered

at the rectory, promptly paid for, and new work obtained, so that by their joint labor and by his unsought acquaintance with Rose Deories and her owner, fourteen dollars had been accumulated during the week. They were truly grateful for this good fortune.

After Jack's lessons were learned the remainder of their evenings was spent in reading the papers. Usually Mrs. Brereton sewed while Jack read aloud, and when he chanced upon descriptions of what stirred his heart, either kindling his anger or rousing his sympathies, his cheeks would flush and his voice grow louder and louder until he would almost shout at his gentle mother, who would raise a warning hand and say, "Softly, Jack, softly; you will wake the children, son." Then he would laugh at himself and come down to the level of his ordinary tone and go on with his search for every item concerning the New York militia regiments, which to say truth were swallowed up in and overshadowed by the more

important "Volunteers," on whom the eyes of the country were fixed, as they thronged from every Northern State, offering their lives by thousands to the Government.

Letters came slowly, mails and telegraphs beside being far less efficient than in our happier days, were just then largely under the control of the War Department, and anxious hearts waited long.

The Ruremont post-office was a part of the one village "store," and Jack had for five successive days presented himself there before a letter came. Had he been Mercury himself, I doubt if he could have had swifter feet than those which carried him flying home. His mother chanced to be looking out of the window as he dashed through the gate waving his cap in one hand and the letter in the other, as the surest way of telling his good news in advance.

The letter was grave but encouraging, full of every detail of their embarkation and of the

strange progress of a citizen of New York going to Washington to protect it against the advance of citizens of other States. It was, he said, like a strange, impossible vision of the night, an incredible hallucination, by which they were deceived and bewildered. Some time, when their journey was over perhaps they would discover that after all their marching in such hot haste, all was well in the wide stately avenues of the capital city, and they would return to wives and home, in happy wonder at what had brought them so far away.

After this, the letter which was written in the form of a journal began to grow into stern realization of the facts, which grew clearer as they went forward and came nearer and nearer the line of division between the severed States, and it closed with a vivid description of their first camp in the vicinity of the famous "Long Bridge" over the Potomac, the guarding of which was to be their present duty.

The record of each day closed with playful

yet tender thoughts of home and recalled jokes which had become parts of the family history, and gave orders to Private John Brereton as to duty at the chicken-house and the well, and the whole long, interesting, inexpressibly precious history ended with a fond and reverent committal of the dear home and all that it contained to God's keeping.

Mother and son read it together, read it alone, read parts of it aloud to each other, and felt as if they had been close to their absent one all the evening.

The first Sunday was indeed a strange day to them, its stillness and sacred rest from labor emphasized their loneliness, and grown accustomed in a degree to their changed lives on week days, they had here a new and harder lesson to learn, in the sadly altered routine of what had hitherto been their happiest day. Everything had been planned to brighten this time when they were all together without the intrusion of any work to separate them.

On each alternate Sunday, the washer-woman's young daughter came to mind the "babbies," while Mr. and Mrs. Brereton went to church together, and Jack staid at home with her to guard the house. The mid-day meal was reduced to the least possible "bite," just to keep them from hunger, and the tea was made delightful with every dainty in Mrs. Breton's power. In this way she was neither hurried before nor after church and yet it was a feast day.

And the afternoons were especially Jack's; after the early Sunday-school was over his father gave himself to him for such walks, such talks, such climbs and rambles, as would live in his memory forever. And upon his plate at tea-time, since he could remember, there had always been a "Sunday surprise." Of late there had been occasional hints that his long legs were outgrowing this childish habit, but it had never failed yet. What would the day be like without father?

At first reluctant to leave him, Mrs. Brereton at last yielded to his persuasion and let him bring faithful Rebecca to the little girls. She longed for the restful influence of God's house and felt as if she would be less lonely there, and she had a strong desire to join in that strange prayer, which was that day to be used for the first time, for those "gone forth in our defense." It would then seem as if all the village joined her in asking God's mercy for her soldier and she in her turn would think of every sorrowing woman in the land. So she went with her quick noiseless step up the road, where the picturesque little church stood hidden in a grove of chestnut-trees.

Jack sat down on the front steps, looking about him and thinking. How still and beautiful it was and what a sweet smell came from the upturned fields and growing grass. How incessantly the birds sang, how happy they seemed! The sky too was full of fleecy clouds skimming over the wide blue vault above him

like swift messengers. His father's favorite cherry-tree was budding finely, all the young fruit looked well; Jack tried to think how far he could manage the garden by himself.

He felt convinced that he must have help from somewhere; he could not manage the digging for want of strength nor the planting for want of knowledge and the garden must be kept up—it was his father's pride, it must be in fine order when he came back—and as an aid to their family living, it could not be spared. Money to pay for a hired man was not to be had; what should he do?

What with planning and thinking and inspecting, the morning flew past before he could believe it possible, and he saw it was time to take Dolly down the road to meet their mother.

How lonely she looked coming between the maple-trees, far down the road! Just here, their father used to stop and hold out his arms to Dolly, who would run with all her might to

be caught up and tossed above her father's head.

Jack felt a queer choking sensation in his throat and oh ! such a longing in his heart, but his brave little mother found a lovely smile wherewith to welcome them, and they strolled back to the house talking of ways and means to get the garden tilled and planted, and in trying to plan how to please and satisfy their absent soldier, forgot, in part at least, their own worry and anxiety.

Help, however, was nearer than Jack imagined, for scarcely was their brief mid-day meal over, when a heavy knock came at the kitchen door, and, on opening it, Tim Kelly, the village ice-man, showed his broad good-natured face and with an awkward bow, wanted to know whether he could speak to Master Jack a minute. He refused to come in, and so Jack, divining that he sought a private interview, went out to him.

“Could I speak to you, Master Jack?”

"Certainly, Tim."

"Would your mother want any ice this summer, do you think?"

"I'll ask her, Tim, but I think not. She has to be very careful what she buys now; you know my father has gone to the war."

"Yes, Master Jack, and that's what made me so bold as to come askin' about the ice." Tim came closer and put up his big hand and whispered loudly in a hoarse, rough voice, as if he had a very bad cold. "I was in hopes I might make a bargain wid yourself, Master Jack, so that Mrs. Brereton could have all the ice she wanted for nothing."

Jack's fixed look of attention showed his extreme perplexity.

Still Tim whispered: "You see I can't neither read nor write as well as I'd loike, and me accounts gets badly mixed sometimes, and I thought maybe you'd take 'em in hand for me once or twice a week and I would give all the ice your mother might want, in return for it."

“What kind of accounts are they, Tim?”

“Oh! well, there’s what ice I buy and there’s what ice I sell, and what profit I make, and how much I leave wid each one of me customers, and the bit I leave at the store, and what I take out there in trade, and what the keep of my horse costs. It’s really nothin’ at all, Master Jack; if I was well learned and my hands wasn’t so stiff, and I wasn’t so sleepy in the evenin’s, I could do it as aisy as anything. I brought me little book wid me; you’ll see it’s all as plain as the nose on your face.”

Tim produced a much soiled “pass-book,” the corners of which were a mass of “dog’s ears” and he looked anxiously over Jack’s shoulder, as the latter examined it. It was without doubt an original manuscript entirely unique in conception and style. No attempt was made to place the figures in columns, nor was there any particular place for dates, but over the small pages, very crooked, nearly illegible characters told that certain people re-

ceived ice, and that occasionally they paid for it, and that Tim had received certain things from the village "store-keeper."

A page read much like this :

" Mis' Paxson Ap. 10. 5. Mister Rooney, same 10. Mis' Roggers same 6. Meself half a pound tea and 1 sugar. Mis' Paxson pade 25 cents. Ap. 11. bag oats for the horse frum store, same afternoon tuk barrel apples down, all square up to to-day. Shued the mare 1 dollar. Mis' Roggers Ap. 16. 10."

Jack's quick eyes gradually began to see that certain families were there charged for certain amounts of ice and that Tim's personal expenditures were readily sifted out from the accounts of his numerous customers. "I think I could straighten it out for you, Tim," he said modestly, "and mother would see if I was doing it all right. I suppose you would want your bills made out also, at the end of the months?"

"O, aye! Master Jack, that's one of my great troubles; some of me customers says they

can't quite make out me writin', and some says they don't know how much ice I've left 'em and so, whiles and agen, there's quite a little worry about it all. Could you manage to do it all fur me, Master Jack dear?"

"I can manage the accounts, Tim, I feel sure about that, for as I told you before, mother would overlook them for me, but I should want something very different from ice in return — something you may not care to give."

"Let's hear what it is, Master Jack."

"I want a man to help me in the garden. I am bound to have everything fine for father when he comes back, everything growing, not a weed to be seen, and the fruit well taken care of. Now, if you feel like giving me a helping hand at this work, I would be glad to keep your accounts and do my very best with them. Father always felt sorry when you gave up gardening, for he said you were worth two other men in the spring, because you understood just what he wanted. Mother has no

money to spare and I have to find some way of getting the work done without paying cash for it."

"How much time would you expect me to give, Master Jack?"

"Just what you would think right yourself, Tim; what you feel was a fair exchange for what I would have to do for you."

"You wouldn't expect me reg'lar every day, would you?"

"Oh! bless your heart, no, Tim; only to lend a hand when you saw it was needed, and after the planting was done, to tell me what to do. I don't know even which are the best seeds nor when to sow them."

"Well, it's a bargain," said Tim, with a sigh of relief. "I can find time when I'm done wid the ice-delivery, and to tell you the truth, I'd rather dig up every foot of the whole place than worry wid them figures; it's the hardest work I ever did in my life. And whatever you do, don't buy musk-melon seed, for I have

just the kind your father likes, and I tell you when he comes back it will go hard if we don't



"WELL, IT'S A BARGAIN," SAID TIM.

find a bit of ice to cool them for his breakfast. I know just how he likes them."

A great weight was lifted from Jack's mind, as Tim turned without further parley and took

a professional look at the garden, pointing out where this and that ought to be planted.

Jack still held what Tim called "me account book," and Tim suddenly catching sight of it, exclaimed with nervous alarm, "O, Master Jack! give me the book, please; it's worry enough as it is, and whatever should I do if I lost it?"

"Let me have it until Tuesday, Tim, and then I think you will find things are easier to understand, and after that I shall have to have an account every day of what you buy and sell, so that we may be sure not to make mistakes. I will be very careful," he added, as Tim's anxious eyes remained fixed on his treasure; "it will be quite safe with me."

"Well, Master Jack, I hope you'll remember that it's awful important, and if you would please say that Mis' Paxson had half a peck russets, on Tuesday; I forgot to put them down. Twenty cents, please, Master Jack."

Bidding Tim good-by at the gate, he came

at a tearing pace back to the kitchen. "Mammy dear, here's a jolly piece of luck! Tim Kelly is going to make garden for me and I am going to keep his accounts to pay for it. We won't have to pay one cent; what do you think of that for a stroke of business, Mrs. Brereton, ma'am?" he said, imitating Tim and making a low bow.

Mrs. Brereton smiled, but her eyes were full of tears. She kissed Jack's joyous face with a tenderness which surprised him. He had no feeling but one of great exultation and could not fathom the depths of his mother's heart, or imagine the pride with which she looked on her energetic helpful boy, and was farther still from finding any clue to the gratitude she felt for the unselfish delight with which he undertook this new and perplexing work, without one thought of the labor it would entail upon himself.

"You are a great manager, son; father will be astonished when he comes home to find what you can do!"

“ Well, this time, I have not done anything but talk to Tim, mother dear. We will know better what I am worth when the time comes to show father the garden. But I tell you one thing that makes me feel very strange; everything I have asked God to give me since father went away, has come right to me.” Jack blushed crimson as he thus laid bare his heart. “ I just prayed for work, as hard as I could, and there came Mr. Holtin’s right off, and I did ask Him so earnestly, to be able to keep everything nice here, for that’s the duty father ordered me to do—you know he did not say a word about my trying to earn money—and I was so troubled because I saw I could not possibly get on without help, and here comes the most unlikely thing in the world to make it all right. Poor Tim! you will just kill yourself laughing over his book.”

The tears which had at first dimmed, now overflowed the happy mother’s eyes. Jack in blank astonishment saw them fall.

"Why, what's the matter, mother?" he asked quickly.

"Don't mind the tears, Jack, I am only too thankful for the help given you, and still more grateful to know that you are trusting to God so fully to guide you, but some day, when you ask and do not receive, dear, you must not grow discouraged. That is the hard time for us all, especially for a young lad like you. No prayer is lost, no cry for help is ever unheard. When our Heavenly Father keeps an awful silence and seems so far away, then, Jack, remember these days, and trust on just the same; you will get an answer some day."

Jack was suddenly sobered and could not follow his mother's eager words, nor understand her fond and intent look at him. "Well, perhaps these were right things to ask for, and so they came," he said timidly.

"The prayer which asks for things in themselves undoubtedly right, may yet seem not to be answered, and there is where it tries our

faith so severely, my darling son. I do not for a moment doubt that your blessings have come to you in quick response from your Heavenly Father's loving hand, and I am rejoiced to think so. Only I want you to remember, Jack, that under all circumstances He hears and blesses, surely blesses us, dear, even when we seem to be denied all we ask and nothing comes as we desire to have it."

Jack, quite unable to grasp all his mother's meaning, edged off from the solemn subject thus suddenly brought before him, and drawing her into a chair threw his arm over her shoulder and held up Tim's book for her inspection. They wandered through its few pages, laughing more and more as they went on, most of all over a most complicated system of exchanges between Tim and the keeper of the village "store," but it soon became easy to see a thread of separation by which Jack's future work could be guided.

An airing for the little girls and a few visits

from the neighbors, concluded the record of this first day of a week, which proved a very busy one for Jack.

Days flew by like hours. Tim worked bravely in the garden and he and Jack gave every afternoon to it, so that on the next Saturday peas and radishes and early spinach were all duly planted and ground was ready for potatoes. And as for the accounts, when Tim found himself possessed of three neat looking little books each devoted to a separate interest, and a fourth, which acted as a ledger, summing up his week's transactions, and in which he could read plainly just what had been done, he felt that the miracle which brought the earth out of chaos, had been outdone, and that nothing was too much for him to do for Master Jack.

Jack's surprises were not yet at an end, and before long he met one at the post-office.

V.

JACK AS A POSTMAN.

RETURNING from Mr. Holtin's on Saturday, Jack stopped to make his usual inquiry at the post-office. The postmaster shook his head: "No letter, Jack, I'm sorry to say. I suppose your mother would love to have a letter to think over to-morrow, for Sundays are lonesome days when one's folks is away; but if I ain't got a letter, I have got a piece of news for you that I think will please you. How would you like to take Mr. Thornton's mail up to Thornhill every day? He don't fancy driving this way every time he goes out, and it takes so much time to send a man on purpose that he wants a trustworthy lad to carry the mail up and down, twice a day."

“What will he pay?”

“Twenty-five cents a trip — half a dollar a day; three dollars a week ain’t to be despised, Jack, and it’s all clear profit.”

Jack hesitated and thought. Three dollars a week; three and two are five. Delightful thought! Five dollars a week, twenty dollars a month, all from his own work. Mother and he between them could save money.

“What are you thinking about, my boy?” questioned the postmaster.

“How I can manage it,” said Jack.

“Oh! that’s it, is it? My wife thought you wouldn’t like going up there, ‘like a messenger boy,’ as she called it, but I knew you had no such nonsense about you, ever since I seen you take hold of Mr. Holtin’s work, the way you did, the very day after your father left. What else have you got to do?”

“Mr. Holtin’s work comes before school, and then in the afternoons I am very busy in the garden, and then there are all the odd jobs, like

wood and water and chickens and everything, and then I keep Tim Kelly's books, and my lessons have to come in sometime. What time do they want the mail?"

"They want the eight o'clock mail to get there before nine, and the five o'clock before six."

It was but a little over a mile up the road, yet it meant four additional miles a day and great regularity and punctuality. Jack held out his hand to the funny-looking old postmaster, who stood behind the counter without any coat and with his "far-sighted spectacles" pushed high upon his forehead, looking intently at the hesitating boy. "Thank you, sir," he said, "you were very kind to think of me; I'll try it for a week, any way. If I can't do it properly, I daresay you can easily find some one else."

"Lots of boys, Jack, lots of 'em; but letters are not to be trifled with, and the Thornhill mail is full of valuable papers, and I hain't found many responsible boys 'round here, yet."

Proud as this made him, Jack still looked at this new business very seriously, for, somehow, rest had been very acceptable lately, when he came out of the garden toward sundown, and he fully understood that four miles a day would be quite a long pull, when he was both busy and tired; but by the time he reached home, pleasure at the additional pay became paramount and he was glad to have this bit of news to tell when he came home from the office empty-handed.

“More work, Jack? I hardly see how you can do it, dear! A steady pull of four miles a day, in hot weather, is not to be thought lightly of, when you have so much else to do.”

“We’ll try it any way, mammy dear. If I was not working, I should very likely be playing ball and running all the afternoon. If I don’t wear out too many shoes, I think it will come out all right. What I am scary about is my plagued old Cæsar; I am afraid study hour will find me pretty sleepy. But, anyhow, it

will do no harm to try, and twenty dollars a month is a jolly thing to have."

So thenceforth, Jack might be seen at the appointed hour, jogging along at a pace half-trot, half-run, which he had learned to keep down to a reasonable speed and which carried him rapidly over the hilly road. There were two small bags with straps, which he carried alternately, handing one in and receiving the other, often without the exchange of a word with the man who took them at the door.

Saturdays were his hardest days. In order to be on time with the morning mail, Jack had to go an hour earlier to Mr. Holtin's; he was often busy with his rake at six o'clock, and it sometimes occurred that even then, after leaving Thornhill, he had to return to complete his task. Mr. Holtin was very kind, and willing to do all he could to make things easy and aid Jack's ceaseless endeavor, but the work had to be done, and all he could do to help was to leave the boy to finish it as he could.

Take one day with another, it became a mechanical and uninteresting tramp, in the summer heat and dust, and though Jack whistled, and even sang a little when he had time enough not to hurry his breath away, and kept his eyes open for such cheery little glimpses of the domestic life of the birds and the squirrels as they would let him see, yet he did not find it an easy way to earn fifty cents a day.

One Saturday, however, brought an unlooked-for break in the monotony of these goings and comings, which in its outcome gave him great pleasure.

Going up the shady walk to Mr. Thornton's house, with his steady, swinging stride, he was checked by a loud whistle coming from a clump of trees on the lawn where some ladies and gentlemen were sitting under the pleasant shelter. "This way, boy," called out a strong voice; "bring the mail here."

Jack turned toward them immediately, but did not unstrap his bag. A gentleman held

out his hand ; Jack's hot face grew very red, and the perspiration on his forehead, already uncomfortably abundant, seemed to issue from every pore like water.

He took off his straw hat courteously and asked, " Are you Mr. Thornton, sir ? "

" No, I am not Mr. Thornton ; he has gone to New York for the day, but I'll take the mail. "

" Are any of the family here ? " again asked Jack, growing painfully embarrassed and still leaving the bag strapped over his shoulder.

" No, no ; we are only friends of Mr. Thornton's, but that makes no difference ; it's all right ; give me the bag, and I'll take care of it. "

The boy's heart beat like an engine throb : " I am very sorry, sir, but I can't. I have positive orders not to give it to any one but Michael at the door, unless Mr. or Mrs. Thornton take it from me. I made a promise never to let any one else take it, and I could not possibly do it. "

“Can’t you take my word that it will be all right, you little fool?” said the gentleman, rising in hot anger. “I have a letter in that bag which I am very anxious to get, and you don’t suppose I am going to wait until Mr. Thornton gets back from New York, do you? Here,” and he took hold of the strap very roughly, “be done with your nonsense and give me the bag; don’t behave like an idiot!”

Jack’s childhood did not lie far behind him, and tears were trying hard to drop from his eyes, though he winked violently and hid them bravely, and he trembled with angry excitement. “If you take it by force, sir,” he said, “I cannot help it, but I will not give it to you.”

The tall man jerked the strap over the boy’s curly head, knocking off his hat; but he was baffled; the bag was locked! “Thornton must think his mail very precious,” he exclaimed, and turning to the ladies he said in a different, but still angry tone: “What on earth are we to do now?”



"IF YOU TAKE IT BY FORCE, I CANNOT HELP IT,"
SAID JACK.

Jack's impulse was to laugh at his defeat, and, truth to say, he did enjoy it, but he had himself well in hand by this time, and an instinct of courtesy to the sweet, sad-looking lady who answered his assailant made him listen attentively to her reply.

"It is hard to bear," she said; "but I must try to wait patiently."

"I will go and find Michael," said Jack; "he has a key and may have permission to open it."

"Oh! you are growing more civil, are you?" said the exasperated man. "Why did you not tell us this before?"

"I did not mean to be rude, sir," said Jack, steadily, "I was only trying to do my duty. I will get Michael, for the lady, at once."

"Here, take the bag with you, and ask if there are any letters for Mrs. Trevor! Hurry up, now."

Jack found it hard to stoop and pick up the bag thrown violently toward him, and when

he did lift it, his chief desire was to take deliberate aim and show his tormentor the skill of the best pitcher in the school nine; but he had gained a great deal of self-control since he had begun to do a soldier's duty, and he caught up the contested mail and went at "double quick" toward the house.

On the piazza, stretched on a wicker lounge, a gentleman lay at full length, reading a paper. Jack sincerely hoped he would not notice him, for he was anything but ready for another struggle over his charge; he therefore neither looked to the right nor left, but stepped rapidly to the door and rang the bell as usual. But the carrier of the post, be he man or boy, is always an object of interest; to Jack's dismay the reclining figure lifted itself up quickly, and a pair of long legs extended themselves to the floor of the veranda, the paper was dropped, and the gentleman sat upright, astride of the wicker lounge.

"What is it, my lad? Whom did you wish

to see? Oh! I see, you have the mail; I'll take it."

Jack's heart sank, but the voice had no flavor of the haughty command of his late adversary, so he took courage, and lifting his hat, he said, respectfully: "I beg your pardon, sir, but I am not allowed to give it to any one but Michael or Mr. and Mrs. Thornton."

"Oh! I see, and quite right, too; Thornton has very important and valuable papers coming to him quite frequently, and indeed, I think you are rather young for the responsibility; but here is Michael."

"Thank you, sir," said Jack, and turned with immense relief to deliver the troublesome bag to the approaching man.

His business-like way of performing his task, and his punctual appearance in all weathers had won Michael's regard; he was a very important functionary in a very fine establishment, and he showed his liking for the boy in a very patronizing manner. "What's the matter, post-

man?" he said good-naturedly; "I never knew you to be five minutes late before. What happened to you?"

"A gentleman under the trees by the gate stopped me, and when I told him I was forbidden to give up the bag, he snatched it from me and was very angry when he found it was locked."

"Oh! it's that fine Mr. Maddox, showing off before poor Mrs. Trevor; she is crazy to hear from her boy who is sick in France, and he has his own reasons for trying to please her. Did he hurt you?"

"O, no! he was only a little rough. It frightened me pretty badly to have to give up the bag, because I had promised faithfully not to, and I did not know but what harm might come from it; but I was not hurt. But, Michael, do please see if the lady has any letter; I ran up to ask you, she looked so sad and patient. And would you please take it to her yourself, Michael; for, to tell you the truth, if that gentle-

man spoke to me again in the way he did before, I don't think I could help saying something pretty lively in return. I had hard work to keep in, I tell you."

The gentleman sitting on the lounge now rose and came close to where they stood, and Michael, for the first time aware of his presence, turned back to fetch the return mail bag from the library.

"I have been listening to your conversation, my boy, and I want you to know that I think you have behaved uncommonly well for a youngster of your years. I will see that Mr. Thornton understands how true you have been to your trust, and I shall congratulate him not only on having a faithful messenger in his employment, but one who is at heart a gentleman."

Jack felt a strange something rise suddenly from some unknown region in his chest and apparently try to get into his mouth; then he suddenly developed a queer tendency to wipe

his eyes with the back of his hand; but without stopping to inquire what was wrong with himself, he said eagerly: "Oh! thank you, sir, I am awfully glad you think I did right. I hardly knew what to do, but as long as my orders were positive, I had to try my best to obey them."

His new friend all at once began to look at him in a very inquiring way, and then exclaimed: "Why, who are you? What is your name?"

"Jack Brereton."

"Oh! that's who you are. I was sure I had some association with your face. So you were the boy who was 'mustered in' as a home guard, when your father went away with his regiment?"

"And you," said Jack, eagerly, "are Chris. Roberts! Oh! I beg your pardon, Mr. Roberts. I thought I knew you, but you had your hat on that day in the cars, and" — Jack stopped and blushed.

"You did not know that I was bald! Out with it, Jack."

"Yes, sir, that was it; and I was so tearing mad when I came up the steps that I didn't notice your face much."

"How did you know my christian name?"

"Father told me not to forget it. You said in joke that day, if I needed reinforcements I was to send for you, and father said I must not forget your name, for although you spoke in fun, you really meant that if I was in trouble, you would help me."

"And so I did, Jack, and so I do. Tell me how things are going at home now."

Jack would gladly have answered at length, but the clock in the hall struck the half-hour and he started with surprise. "I must go, Mr. Roberts," he said regretfully; "I have overstayed my time, and I shall be late for the down mail."

He was darting off, when Mr. Roberts called after him:

“Wait one minute more and I’ll go with you; I only want my hat and stick.”

“I shall have to run, sir.”

“I have not entirely forgotten that accomplishment, Jack; come on now, and let us take a pace we can keep, and we will talk after we have delivered the letters.”

So on they went, the big white-flanneled man renewing his athletic days, and thin-legged Jack well up beside him, with never a word said between them until they caught sight of the old postmaster looking anxiously up the road, with the mail pouch in his hand.

“Well done, Jack,” said Mr. Roberts, rubbing away vigorously at his face and bald head. “That was a steady pull for us both. Jack is not to blame, Postmaster,” he added kindly; “they detained him at Thornhill. He is a first-class postman, I can testify.”

The friendly old man smiled and said dryly: “We are well acquainted with Jack in Ruremont.” Then he locked his pouch with evident

satisfaction and put it in position for "the fast limited," now heard thundering along a mile up the road.

As soon as they had rested long enough to regain their exhausted breath, Mr. Roberts said: "And now I want to go home with you, Jack, if you will have me for a companion. I want to see how you are doing your duty at your home-post, and to be introduced to your mother. You will have to imagine me a government inspector."

Jack was not sure that his mother would be wholly pleased to see this stranger walking in unexpectedly, but he felt the warmth of his kindness deeply, and courtesy could do no less than bid him come and welcome. And as they walked on, Mr. Roberts drew out all the details of the boy's busy, energetic life, without appearing either inquisitive or unduly curious. They seemed by mutual attraction to get on thoroughly well together, and Jack spoke as openly and freely as if they had been friends for years.

"Take it altogether you lead a pretty active life of it, don't you?"

"Yes, sir; I have to keep going," laughed the boy, "but I enjoy myself very much. You see everything is like a sort of a play; something new is coming out of it all the time. The money I earn goes a long way towards keeping things straight, and I do so enjoy receiving it and handing it over to mother. Then Tim Kelly's accounts are just like a joke book, and keep me roaring; and as to the garden, why, I daresay you know how it is about a garden, yourself. There is always something unexpected happening to surprise you, and you are always either frightened to death for fear something is going to die, or else perfectly delighted to find something coming on splendidly that you did not think would live. It's awfully interesting, and the chickens are just pure fun. You must see my Plymouth Rock rooster, Captain Bragg; he's as funny as the clown in a circus. I must be sure to show you old Captain Bragg!"

Mr. Roberts looked at his young companion with an interest that grew more earnest and even affectionate each moment. A boy too busy ever to find a playtime, yet entirely contented; carrying heavy responsibilities without feeling their weight, because of the strength of his unselfish wish to aid his mother and serve his absent father; merry and bright as a boy could be, yet full of deep feeling; such lads were not found every day, and the old postmaster's half-cynical objection to be told of Jack's merits, recurred to his memory. No wonder he was "well known about Ruremont!"

When they reached the gate, Jack asked Mr. Roberts to let him run forward and tell his mother, and he found her just in the midst of sweeping the dining-room. The little parlor, cool and shady, was in lovely order, and Jack gave a quick glance at his mother and thought she looked as pretty as he had ever seen her, with the flush of her active exercise

brightening her cheeks, which nowadays were apt to lack color.

"Mother," he said, "Mr. Roberts, a friend of father's, wants to see you."

"Has he brought any bad news?" she questioned nervously.

"No, indeed; no news at all; he just came down with me from Thornhill. I met him in the cars the day father went away."

Further explanation was impossible, for Mr. Roberts' footsteps were heard upon the veranda, and Jack had left the door open. Laying her broom quickly out of her hand and pulling off one glove, Mrs. Brereton advanced to meet the handsome and dignified man who stood at the threshold. They advanced together and he met her more than half-way, and his cordial greeting warmed her heart and disarmed her embarrassment at once.

"Forgive me, Mrs. Brereton, for intruding upon you in this way, but the pleasure of Jack's company beguiled me, and I have en-

joyed our long walk very much. Your husband told me on the day he left, of his mustering Jack in as your body-guard and of his duties here, and I have come to inspect the post."

The little girls were taking their morning nap and Mrs. Brereton, for a wonder, was uninterrupted and found great pleasure in the bright cheerfulness and cultivated intelligence of her visitor. She ventured to ask his opinion of the outlook of the war and found he did not share the bright hopes of the newspaper prophets, nor had he any sympathy with the fashion of the hour to make light of the struggle and disparage the courage and endurance of the South. She was induced by his unusually frank and interested manner to speak far more freely than was common with her, and enjoyed the intercourse with a mind which reminded her strongly of her husband's.

Jack being absent for a short time, he praised the boy with almost affectionate earnestness.

Mrs. Brereton's eyes filled with pleasant tears, but she said gravely :

"Promise me, Mr. Roberts, that you will not give a hint of all this to my boy. What I value most in the whole matter is his entire unconsciousness of his own merits and the delightful simplicity with which he continually adds to his own burdens, and seizes every possible means of aiding his father without one thought of himself."

"I have many things belonging to me," said the kind rich man, "of which my neighbors may be envious, but I covet Jack, and bachelor as I am, I can hardly see how Brereton tore himself away from his home ; it was a tremendous sacrifice."

Jack here entered, impatient of the long grave talk. "Mr. Roberts," he said, "Captain Bragg has been crowing for half an hour calling you to admire him, and you have not seen the garden yet."

Mr. Roberts immediately rose, evidently

pleased at what his mother felt might seem too free and easy a tone, and began at once a close inspection of the premises. First, he looked at the clean and well-stocked poultry yard, gave Captain Bragg his meed of praise, and appeared as much interested in small fruits as any professional gardener. Jack would have been amazed had he known how little his friend understood about what he so judiciously admired.

The strawberries promised a great crop, the cherries hung thick on the trees, and the currant bushes were fringed with delicate green berries. "What a lot of fruit you have, Jack; what will you do with it all?"

"I am trying to arrange to sell it at the post-office, but I don't know whether I can get a fair price that way. Somehow or other I am bound to get a 'fiver' out of them for the big fund."

Mr. Roberts' well-filled purse felt uncomfortably heavy in his pocket, and he longed to open it and give the eager boy at once more than

all his hard work could earn in the length of the season ; but respect for his manliness and something like envy for the lad's delightful experience in his modest success, held back his hand. He thought of all the commonplace ways of playing benefactor : money given to the little girls ; a bank-note left half-hidden by a book on Mrs. Brereton's work table, but his better judgment said "No" to each in turn. It would lower the beauty of their faithful, unselfish lives to put them in this position. "Their loving self-denial is what sustains this sweet mother and her proud boy in their lives of labor, and it would mar all to make them recipients of such gifts as these. A darker hour may come, when aid may be necessary, and I will bide my time," he said to himself.

With a big pansy in his buttonhole, he returned to the house, where, to Jack's great relief and pleasure, Mrs. Brereton had prepared a delicate lunch, which she had served upon a

tray beside the open window in the parlor. His hospitable heart and a sense that the kitchen and Mr. Roberts did not seem to belong together, had left him puzzled as to what his mother could do to refresh his friend, and here it was all solved.

A few slices of her own delicious bread, an omelet golden as an orange, a dainty little dish of his father's favorite strawberry preserves, and a glass of ice-cold milk made at least a tempting and refined repast, which Mr. Roberts seemed heartily to enjoy.

Dolly's feet pattering overhead told Mrs. Brereton that sleepy time was over. Before he left, Mr. Roberts saw that, stranger though he was, he could find a way into the good graces of the little girls; and, bachelor as he was, he was astonished to find them delightful acquaintances. Something undefinable about him made them feel the same ease that Jack felt in his society; there was a faint reminder of their father in his cheery, courteous manner.

Altogether his visit was charming to himself and Jack, and he left, promising to surely come again when next he should visit Mr. Thornton; but when he came again to Ruremont, he had little thought of Thornhill, and came solely for the Breretons' sake.

VI.

THE TWENTY-FIRST OF JULY, 1861.

THE months slipped by after the fashion of hot summer days and nights; the garden was a wonder of prolific growth and Jack made good sales of his fruits and vegetables, both at the post-office and by Tim Kelly's active assistance among his customers. When the latter brought his daily account of his sales and payments, Jack would often find scratched on the back of the paper, "3 quarts strawberries fur Mistur Roggers," or "a basket of currins fur Mis' Paxson's jelly," which meant orders to be called for the next morning.

They had no illness; both children thrive and grew apace, the old fund was untouched and the new one became steadily larger; letters came frequently from their absent soldier and all

seemed as well as they could reasonably hope, but Mrs. Brereton's face wore a wistful, tired look and her merry smiles were rarely seen; she had grown silent too, and as for Jack, he seemed at least a year older than when his father left them, and was as gaunt as a greyhound.

The strain told on both mother and son, though neither admitted to the other that they were tired and Jack laughed at the idea, when his mother's anxious questions tried to draw out a confession of weariness. School had closed on the seventeenth of June and that mended matters in some ways, but the weeds were rampant, and Tim, in the height of his summer traffic, had little time at his command, and Jack, for the most part, made war on their vigorous growth, single-handed. Sometimes, despite laughter and protestations, his mother would find him beside his bed, fallen into a heavy sleep; prayers begun had ended with a drooping head and a motionless body, which told their own tale.

Near Washington the daily enlarging armies were becoming powerful, organized and disciplined; on either side the leaders watched and waited, neither seeming eager to bear the responsibility of beginning an attack. The militia regiments which had stood guard over the Capitol until a permanent and fully organized army could be put into the field, had served out the time for which they had volunteered, and Mrs. Brereton's friends and neighbors began to speak cheerfully to her of the day when the regiment would be coming home, and assure her that now all danger was past of her husband being called upon to fight.

They had done a splendid work, these unselfish men, who, at so much personal sacrifice, had thus promptly hastened to the front and formed a living bulwark around Washington, and they would now soon be honorably discharged and return to their homes with the thanks of the Union and no scars. Already July had come, and was on the wane; virtually

the three months were past and gone; and then, on the eighteenth of July, on the very day which properly terminated their term of service, Brereton's regiment was ordered across the Potomac. Danger was at hand; the Federal forces had decided to take the initiative step, and in the evening the men who had felt that nothing stood between them and home except the lapse of a few fast-passing hours, encamped on the southern side of the dividing river and knew that a battle was too imminent for them to dream of retreat.

At Ruremont the whole village made itself busy, planning how they would welcome their soldier, when suddenly a dark cloud of fear came over them all, hanging heavily above the bright little home so bravely kept by the mother and her boy. News came that the regiment had been incorporated into General Burnside's brigade, that a great battle was close at hand, and that the army was moving forward toward the ill-fated field of Manassas Plains. The eager,

happy hearts which had begun to count the days and even the hours, throbbed anxiously; the little preparations which mother and son were constantly making, came to a sad halt.

The nightly reading of the newspapers became a work of fear and dread, and tacitly, without words of explanation, work begun was suspended. Curtains newly washed, which were to have been hung immediately, lay in their snowy folds untouched; fruit which Jack had refused to pick, watching the finest eagerly, and counting largely on his father's enjoyment, was now, without any words, laid in the tidy baskets with a big B, which had by this time grown familiar to all persons who dealt at the shop kept by the postmaster. His trips to Thornhill became tiresome to his discouraged heart, and as he worked away at Mr. Holtin's he would catch himself dreaming with rake or broom in hand.

The seventeenth passed; the eighteenth; yet to these two devoted hearts the end did not

come! On the morning of the latter day they received the following letter, ever after very precious to them both:

DEAR WIFE:

I cannot say much; before many hours a battle must be fought and our regiment is sorely needed. There are many troops here, in numbers perhaps amply sufficient, but they are largely raw recruits, and as we are at least accustomed to military order and discipline and the use of arms, it would be a piece of dastardly meanness to ask our discharge before the fight.

You can understand that I am wholly unable to write of what this means to us both, and to my poor old Jack. If I were to attempt to express what I feel, I should lose the strength I so greatly need in this terrible crisis. How long have I looked forward to this day and pictured my return! Thank God, I know you will be ready to help me do my duty and will be patient and brave. Tell my boy he too must consider that he is called to volunteer for extra duty, and wait to be mustered out until God sends me home.

We march to-morrow toward Fairfax Court House. Our regiment is in Burnside's Brigade of General McDowell's division. Fear nothing, but hope all things; if sorrow comes you will have lost nothing by meeting it with courage.

Of all the many things you and I would talk of, if we were together to-night, time is too brief for me to say anything helpful or explicit. What was needful to say on matters of business was fully explained on that last evening, and you know where to find my papers. I have nothing to add to what was then arranged.

Kiss Dolly and Baby for me; tell Jack he has more than fulfilled my expectations and entirely satisfied me, and bid him keep steady as a rock. For yourself, dear, all I might, but dare not say, you know already. Hope, pray, and keep strong for your

Devoted husband,

JOHN BRERETON.

Jack stood behind his mother and at her invitation read this brief letter over her shoulder. As he finished it, he walked quickly from the room and went out on the veranda. Heat, throbbing, palpitating heat, burned over the parched grass before the door; dust arose from the road beyond; the flowers hung their heads; there seemed nothing to refresh him, and for the first time in his life, Jack found no comfort "out-of-doors." Nature had always had a very kindly influence heretofore, but this burning

July sun brought him no balm. He turned back to the room where his mother sat, and found she had taken Flossy upon her knee, and was dropping her rings into the little fat hands, to amuse the child. Dolly was busy with her blocks in the corner.

As Jack came in, silent and with a heavy look of trouble in his face, his sweet mother, continuing her mechanical play with Baby, looked up at him and gave him such a dear, brave, trembling smile, that Jack's heart felt as if dew had fallen on him at high noon. It spoke to him in such a pathetic way, of just the obedient effort to fulfill his father's request for which he was struggling, that he found immediate help. This was the face and the smile of one who had hoped and prayed and loved with all her heart.

Jack knelt down suddenly beside her chair and put his long boyish arms around both his mother and Flossy; at the same time, "Mammy," he said, "I am ashamed of myself, but I

ran out without remembering that I left you alone. I felt as if I must go and get a breath of fresh air. I felt as if I could not stand it! Not much like a soldier, am I? And you," he said with the accent of a lover, "so brave and patient, all the time!"

Mrs. Brereton leaned forward and kissed his forehead where the nervous contracted lines gave him an older and unnatural expression, and shook her head as if deprecating his praise.

"My papa is coming home to-morrow," said Dolly, as if giving information exclusively her own.

Jack saw his mother's self-control was sorely tasked, and catching Flossy suddenly in his arms, said, "Leave the children to me a little while and go where you can get a few minutes' quiet by yourself, mother dear; it will rest you."

She did not pause to reply, but went quickly out of the room, and Jack, who had hardly said as much to himself as yet, felt he must explain

matters to Dolly, so that she would not distress his mother with her happy chatter about his father's coming. So making a hard push for courage and all the time direfully afraid of breaking down, he put Flossy on the floor beside her sister and began to amuse them both, by piling their blocks into a high column, sure to fall with a delightful crash.

"Dolly," he said, in the quiet which followed the first downfall, "mother got a letter this morning and father can't come home just yet. They want him to stay a little longer and we will have to wait until he can be spared. Will you be a very good girl and help mamma, and not ask her any questions about when he can come? As soon as I know, I'll tell you right away, and poor mamma is so sorry it makes her cry to talk about it. Will you try not to ask about papa to-day?"

"Yes," said Dolly, "I'll be a good girl."

"You surely will? You won't forget?"

"No, I won't forget," said Dolly, coming

suddenly very close to him and thrusting her fat little finger almost into Jack's eyes. "Why, you are crying yourself, Jack! Ain't you ashamed, when you are such a big boy!"

Her intensely funny attitude and her assumption of superiority as she looked at her wet finger, on which Jack's one reluctant tear still clung, restored the boy's equilibrium. "Yes, I am ashamed, Dolly; I won't do it any more. Come," he said, half-laughing, "let us build a big pile now," and up went another foredoomed column, as high as Flossy's head.

Mrs. Brereton did not tax his patience long, but came back soon, with a sweet serenity in her grave face which was not born of earth, and sent Jack off to his neglected work.

The nineteenth, the twentieth and the twenty-first days of July passed; the papers brought but scanty details, and no other letter came. No army news reached New York except such as was authorized for publication by General Scott, and it was carefully worded so as to give

no information to the enemy, should it find its way across the Potomac. All they knew was, that General McDowell had gone forward and that the battle-ground was likely to be near Manassas Plains. Each morning Jack rose yet earlier than before, and had a paper in his hands as soon as the train left them at the station for the newsdealers. On the twenty-second, only about one third the usual number of copies were given out at Ruremont. A battle had been fought, and the edition had not been large enough to meet the frantic demand in the city for the printed account, so that very few could be spared to the rural stations. Jack was not able to secure a paper for himself, but he was allowed to read the great letters in the headings of the columns as he stood among those who crowded around the agent.

“Victory. A Splendid Victory. The Capital Safe.” A wild outburst of such phrases, in immense capitals, was easily read, but the actual account of the battle was painfully scant

and unsatisfactory. No numbers, no details, no facts. Nothing but victory and gallantry and splendid fighting, made into sentences which sounded very well, and roused great enthusiasm. Jack hastened home to give his mother the small store of information he had been able to obtain.

She was numb with fear, and sent him quickly back, bidding him try everywhere — post-office, telegraph station, railway office, everywhere and in every direction whence news could come — to find some information of his father's regiment. But, amidst the strain of fright and doubt, duty had yet to be done, and Jack reached Mr. Holtin's not long after his usual time.

The kind master was out looking for his morning's paper, and hearing from the excited boy why it had not come, he bade him leave his work, without a moment's delay, and hurry back to his mother.

But Mr. Thornton's mail was a different sort

of affair; it only gained in importance by this crisis, and must be delivered immediately. Jack's good old friend, the postmaster, came out to meet him, bag in hand. "I wish I had a substitute for you to-day, my boy," he said kindly, "for I know you must want to stay at home, but I can't find any person I can trust. Every one is down at the telegraph office or the railroad station. I'll do my best to find out all I can for you while you are gone."

Jack's thin legs carried him flying up the dusty road, and he was quite ten minutes ahead of time when Mr. Thornton on horseback met him, a quarter of a mile beyond the gate.

"Ah!" he said in a tone of pleased surprise, "there you are. I was afraid you might not come. I had a private telegram about the battle. I knew I could depend on you, but this is a faithfulness I shall remember a long time. Any news from your father? Are you sure he was in this fight?"

"Yes, sir, I think it is certain he was. He wrote us to expect it."

Mr. Thornton looked earnestly at the pale, resolute face of the poor lad, and said, with a gentleness very unusual to him: "Don't bother about the evening mail, I'll ride in for it myself. You get back as soon as you can; there may be a telegram coming, or something. How does your mother bear it?"

Jack's voice trembled: "She is very brave, sir; but it's breaking her heart!"

"Yes, yes; Mr. Roberts told me she was a lovely woman. Get home to her now as fast as you can."

Jack bounded back and was soon at the telegraph office, where half the village were waiting for more authentic news. Soon finding how vain and hopeless it was to stand in the midst of this excited crowd, he returned to give his trying report to his mother.

By noon the suspense became unbearable, and Mrs. Brereton grew so pale and haggard

that Jack became alarmed lest she were going to be ill. Suddenly she said to him: "Son, go upstairs and dress yourself; I am going to send you to New York. You can surely hear something at the armory."

The boy was only too thankful for the chance of doing anything active, and he began to get ready in hot haste, hoping to catch the one o'clock train, but as he dressed, he grew more and more reluctant to leave his mother to wait alone, a prey to her distressing doubts. Her white face haunted him. He ran downstairs and astonished her by entreating her to go with him to New York.

"Get ready, mother," he said. "I'll run over to Mrs. Paxson's and I know she will come and take care of the children, and I'll get 'Becca, too, so she can't have any trouble."

Mrs. Brereton hesitated. "Yes, dear," she said; "yes, Jack, I'll go."

"Hurry up, then," he said, and was dressed and at Mrs. Paxson's in an incredibly short time.

All hearts were open to his call; he could have had half a dozen nurses for the children, if needful; Mrs. Paxson was at the cottage door and 'Becca was in sight, in ample time for his mother and himself to be sure of their train, and Mrs. Brereton began to lose her strained and unnatural look as soon as she had something to do, instead of enduring that silent still watching and listening, which had kept every nerve tense since day-dawn. Every step had been to her the possible approach of the messenger of death, every sound a source of dread.

At all the stations flags were flying, and on board the train strangers conversed freely with each other and shared the scanty extras, which were eagerly sought at every stopping place.

Arriving at New York, the city wore the aspect of a holiday. Flags gaily floated from every conceivable point; people hurried to and fro, excitement was visible on every face, and the newsboys rushed wildly about, shouting:

"Last edition — extra," at the top of their tired voices. Windows flew open, daintily dressed ladies ran hastily into the streets, almost snatching the sheets, which contained little worth reading; a hundred copies of an extra would be exhausted in ten minutes.

Jack and his mother saw all and said little, while they drove slowly over the jolting pavement until they reached their looked-for street. No sooner were they on the sidewalk and mingling in the crowd than they were instantly conscious that those around them were in strange contrast with the joyous display of flags and the exultant words of victory everywhere to be read. Knots of people stopped the steady stream of foot passengers, who, gathering around a nucleus, soon became noisy crowds who talked with loud voices and made vehement gestures.

Something I cannot put into words at once alarmed the sensitive hearts of the anxious mother and son. Jack took upon himself to

question a kind-looking old gentleman, who turned sadly away from some men, with whom he had been talking. "Is there any bad news, sir? My father is a soldier."

The gentleman stopped instantly; in those life-and-death days people were patient with such interruptions. "I trust he is a brave one, then, my boy," he said. "Yes, the news is bad enough."

"Wasn't it true about the victory?"

"Victory! Why, boy, we are terribly defeated; terribly, shamefully defeated. There were men who ran off the field and left their arms behind them."

Jack's cheeks flamed like a sunset. "My father would sooner die!" he said proudly.

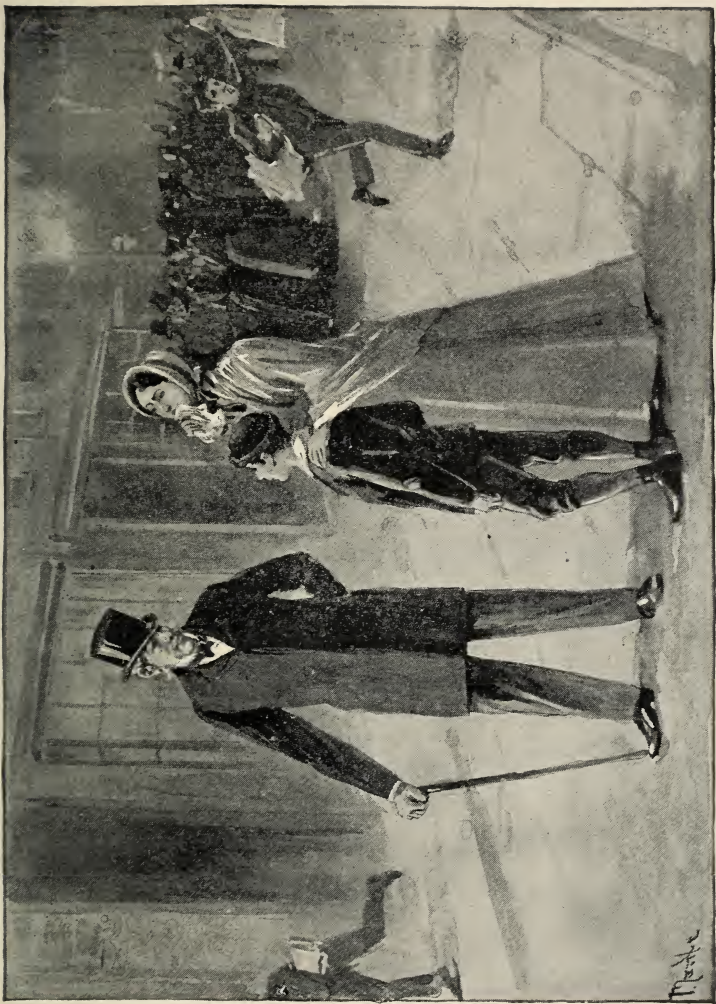
"I hope he would, I hope he would," said the old gentleman sadly, and looking up, and seeing Mrs. Brereton's sad, inquiring face, he added gently to her, "I hope you will have good news of your husband, madam," and walked on.

Soon they caught sight of the armory and over it hung a flag at half-mast! Mrs. Brereton stopped short and her breath came heavily. "Some one is dead," she said in a whisper. "O, Jack! some one is dead."

"Maybe it is for the defeat, mother," he stammered out. "See! all the flags are being lowered. Don't stop here; let us get to the armory as soon as we can."

But they were unexpectedly impeded. To them, John Brereton, Company A, was the one soldier to be inquired for, but here were hundreds of people—mostly women, many with their children in their arms, or tugging at their skirts—weeping, talking, pushing, and all on the same errand.

Jack's acquaintance with the armory stood him in good stead. "Let us go to the lower door," he said. There they found a sentry; Jack's face was a passport and the soldier listened at once. "My father, John Brereton, is in Company A; we live in the country, at



"IS THERE ANY BAD NEWS, SIR? MY FATHER IS A SOLDIER."

Ruremont, and my mother wants to get the news. Could you let us in?"

The calm, lovely, heart-broken face of Jack's mother was in sharp contrast to the violent crowd behind her. "I cannot let you in," the soldier said, "but I can tell you the news. The regiment behaved splendidly and received the highest praise; the returns are not yet in."

"Are there any wounded?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Any — any dead?"

"Yes, ma'am; but we haven't got the names right yet."

"Are there any names sent?"

"Yes, ma'am; but only a few. They'll put out bulletins as fast as they come. There! there goes one now." A large "poster" was being hung from an upper window.

Not stopping to thank the kind soldier, Jack seized his mother's hand and almost dragged her across the street, and mounted a high flight of steps, where they read the placard easily.

“Regiment fought with great courage, and did splendid service. Returns as far as known are as follows:” then followed name after name, name after name, with mention of the company to which each belonged, but no John Brereton.

Slowly the crowd dropped away, too many with deadly sorrow at their hearts; those unsatisfied, like our poor Jack, still watched and waited. The afternoon waned, and the owner of the house on whose steps they stood came home. He looked with quick sympathy at the patient figures watching the slowly swelling list.

“You have friends in the regiment?” he asked.

“My father,” said Jack; “and this is my mother.”

“Do, madam, come in and rest, I beg of you, and let your son watch here.”

Mrs. Brereton looked at him in a half-wondering way; her senses were numb and dull. “Do come in and rest,” he said again, more urgently; “my wife will be so glad to welcome you; she has a son in the army.”

"Mother dear, do go in," said Jack, frightened at her looks, which he had been too absorbed to notice.

The gentleman bent respectfully toward the frail figure, whose aspect was so unconsciously pathetic. "These sorrowful days do away with ceremony," he said; "we are all sufferers together, and it is a privilege to be of use to a soldier's wife. The favor would be to us if you would come in and rest."

"Please, mother dear," pleaded Jack, "just for a little while."

Loosening her hold on the banister, Mrs. Brereton discovered that she was unable to stand without support, and taking the proffered arm of her unknown friend, she went slowly with him into the house, remembering, as she became conscious of her weakness, that she had eaten nothing since her early breakfast.

Suspecting that Jack too was fasting as well as weary, their kind host came to urge him to join his mother, but he could not turn his

back on that fateful window with its changing placard.

“What is your name?” asked the gentleman.

“Brereton, sir — Jack Brereton.”

“Is your father an officer?”

“No, sir; only a private in Company A.”

“Then I fear your watch is in vain, for in this dreadful confusion I doubt if many but conspicuous names will be heard from to-day. Have you far to go to reach home to-night?”

“To Ruremont, sir.”

“Your mother is looking for you; she is at the window.”

Jack to his delight saw her seated beside an elderly lady, with a cup in her hand, and a look of returning color in her cheeks.

“Mrs. Hinman (my name is Hinman) is taking good care of her, and I will see if I cannot be of some use over there.” He passed quickly across the street and disappeared in the crowd.

In a short time he returned and kindly laying a hand on either shoulder said: “I have

ascertained, positively, that you can hear nothing more to-night; all communication is cut off for the present, except for Government purposes. I have influence with the officer in charge of the armory, and he has given me his word to let me have immediate information, if your father's name is mentioned. I have opportunities which you could not have; trust me; take your mother home, if she cannot stay here, and I will telegraph the moment news arrives."

Jack had seen the crowd give way, and watched with surprise, as Mr. Hinman made his entrance within the guarded doors, and no one could doubt the kind, dignified face looking down at him. "I will try to persuade mother to do as you say," he answered sadly, "and I am very much obliged to you, sir, but it will be awfully hard to go back without hearing anything."

Mr. Hinman did not try to make light of this sad truth, but led the way into the beautiful

house, where Jack found his mother leaning back in a cushioned chair, with Mrs. Hinman close beside her.

Mrs. Brereton came eagerly forward as they entered, and Mr. Hinman did not wait for her to speak. "We can have no hope of further news to-night," he said gently; "I have assured myself of that beyond a doubt, and since Jack tells me that you must return to your little ones, I would advise that you should wait no longer. I have secured a promise of the first intelligence and will forward it instantly. I wish we could keep you here over night."

Mrs. Brereton looked toward Jack. "No news is allowed to come, mother; Mr. Hinman has power to hear before we can; we had better go at once."

Slowly, and with a body as weary as her heart, the dear little woman made herself ready to return to her babies and gratefully bade her new-made friends "good-by." Already she and her boy had won a place in their regard,

and they were at least that much the richer for this dark day's work.

At Ruremont, every carriage at the station was eagerly offered to drive them home, and Jack was delighted to see how tender every one was of his mother, but for himself, hungry and tired as he was, he trudged off to the telegraph office, to make sure that he neglected nothing.

And when, exhausted in mind and body, he paused at the little gate, he had no heart for the childish offering of his evening report and could only find energy to raise his eyes toward the Heaven above him, in token that he was faithful to his duty.

Had he any father on earth?

VII.

THINGS NORTH AND SOUTH OF "DIXIE'S LINE."

MRS. BRERETON'S face told its own story to Mrs. Paxson and 'Becca; only questioning Jack to learn what form of trouble they had encountered, and lovingly adding what she could, to give courage and hope, Mrs. Paxson left her friend to the quiet she so evidently needed.

'Becca, at Jack's earnest request, staid on to put the children to bed and spare his mother any greater fatigue, and she, for once, yielded to their urgent entreaty and lay still in the now cool parlor until tea was ready.

Afterward, when the dusk of evening fell, and the dew gave some refreshment to the fevered earth, Jack took his father's folding-chair out on the veranda; he made it com-

fortable with a large shawl, and brought out his mother into the stillness of the summer night. "Everything seems better out of doors, mother dear," he said pleadingly; "it seems to take the fever out of your forehead and cheeks just to come outside the house."

And it was better! The dewy moisture of the night distilled a balm for her tired nerves, and the sounds of night, the delicate stir of the leaves, the faint chirp of the insects, had in them a nameless soothing which she felt immediately. Belated Jack had many things to do by lantern light, long as the summer day had been; but soon he came back, and sitting close beside her, slid his sinewy young hand under his mother's shawl and stroked her slender fingers. Only a mother knows what it is to be comforted by her own boy! When the little hand which has clung so helplessly to hers grows strong to uphold, she leans hard and is blessed indeed.

Their peaceful quiet was but of short dura-

tion, for neighbor after neighbor came to ask for news and offer service of every sort, and Jack was more than ever glad that the darkness sheltered them. It all seemed so much easier than if they were obliged to bear the questioning looks of even kindly eyes like these. He did the talking and no one staid long, for it was too unusual a sight to see Mrs. Brereton lying down and obliged to show that she had grown faint by the way, to need any hint that she must not be tired by visitors.

At Ruremont, as in all railway towns, the trains served to tell the time, and at last Jack said: "Mother, the ten minutes to twelve train has gone down; couldn't you go to bed? You'll be worn out to-morrow, I am afraid, if you do not get some sleep."

"Yes, son, I'll go. There can be no chance of any news now, for they said the telegraph operator was going to close the office at twelve o'clock. And you too, dear Jack, must be very tired."

"Well, I think I must be," he said, as if reflecting on some one else's condition; "but I am not a bit sleepy. Listening and watching so, keeps you awake; but I want to be up in time to catch the paper train in the morning, so I think we had better go to bed."

As Mrs. Brereton went slowly upstairs, she paused while Jack locked the door and put out the hall light, and the change in her relations to her boy came sharply before her. The child his father left so short a time ago, whose chief responsibility had been to obey, had passed completely out of sight, and her sensible adviser and invaluable aid stood in his place.

Sleep came to both their troubled hearts ere long, as, thank God, it comes to most weary ones who trust in him, and Jack started violently when the morning light, coming through the open window, roused him from some bewildering dream. He peeped into his mother's room and saw with delight that she

slept the heavy sleep of exhausted mind and body, so he moved noiselessly about and crept downstairs to catch the train. He found a large proportion of the village boys and men going the same way, on the same errand, and it certainly was a pleasant beginning to the day, to receive such warm and kindly greetings as they gave him.

The train came and went, and the papers only repeated what he had seen and heard at the armory the day before. A few names were added to the already too long list; there was a steadier tone in the various accounts, more stories of gallantry, fewer of disgraceful flight, and that was all. Jack secured all the information he could, and started to walk back.

To his intense surprise, he saw the unmistakable figure of Mr. Thornton galloping toward him. "Yesterday's news has made me so miserable," he said, "that I could not sleep well, and I rode down for an early paper. Have you any news of your father yet?"

"No, Mr. Thornton, not one word."

"That's hard to bear, Jack, hard to bear. Tell Mrs. Brereton if she wants anything to send at once to me; tell her that yesterday, by means under my control, I tried to get her some information directly from Washington, but they did not even know there where your father really was."

"Oh! that was very kind."

"Kind? nonsense, boy. It is a terrible thing to wait in suspense like this, and you and your mother have done your duty too well not to have plenty of friends ready to do all they can for you." He put his horse to a gallop and was off, but in a moment wheeled suddenly back. "Have you all the money you want?"

"O, yes indeed! plenty, thank you."

"Well, remember, I expect you to let me know if it gives out. Don't let your mother want for anything, and don't have my mail on your mind at present; it is a relief to me to keep moving, and I'll ride down for it myself.

I'll hear from you to-morrow, and if you get any news let Trenchard, the postmaster, know and he'll see that I get it immediately."

Mr. Thornton moved away too fast for thanks to reach him, and Jack was so taken by surprise at this expression of interest, and by the thoughtful endeavor to comfort and help his mother, that he would hardly have known what to say, even had he lingered. It was a solace to Mrs. Brereton to know that this busy and important man so valued her boy that he was taking such pains to relieve their distress; so Jack's story was better than nothing, when he came back without the longed-for news. All the remainder of the morning left thus freely at his disposal, the poor lad went back and forth from station to office, from office to station, on the same fruitless errand.

A few minutes after the noon train had arrived from New York, Jack, alert for every possibility, saw a gentleman walking rapidly up the road, and gradually he recognized Mr.

Roberts. He came nearer and finally paused at the gate and whistled. Jack ran rapidly to meet him, and Mr. Roberts, laying a hand on either shoulder, looked down affectionately into his troubled face.

"How is your mother, Jack?"

"Oh! miserable enough, Mr. Roberts, but trying to go on as usual. You know she is always so brave and patient."

"Could she see me?"

"Yes; I am sure she would be very glad to. She sees every one who calls, and never gives way for a moment." Perhaps Mr. Roberts had brought news. "Do you know anything to tell her, Mr. Roberts?"

"No, Jack; but I saw Mr. Hinman last night; we came across each other at the armory. He is an old friend of mine, and he told me how you and your mother had rested on his steps. I knew you by his description in a moment, and he and I were both there on the same errand, trying to get some correct account for

you. I told him a good deal about you both, Jack, and you have made one more good friend, and a very powerful one too, I can tell you. Mr. Hinman is a man who has great influence both in New York and Washington, and if any tidings of your father can be obtained he will do it, before any one else; the telegram will be sent to me in Trenchard's care."

They were by this time nearly up to the house; Jack stopped. "Mr. Roberts, what do you think?"

"About your father?"

"Yes, sir." Jack's face was like a bit of white parchment. The penetrating, eager look of the boy's eyes was too keen to encourage deception; his manly bearing bespoke his high courage; Mr. Roberts knew he had endurance.

"Jack," he said, "I fear the worst that can come to a brave man on a battle field. It is impossible that he did not do all his duty, and misfortune has surely come to him. Boy as you are, I have respected you from the day

I saw you so hardly tried at Thornhill, and I will treat you like a man, and make no attempt to deceive you. False hope can do you no good, and without the whole truth between us, I cannot advise you to any good end. Can you keep steady? Can you control yourself for your mother's sake?"

"I'll try," said the suffering boy, with trembling lips; "I'll do my best."

Mr. Roberts threw his arm over Jack's shoulder, as his father used to do. "Don't feel lonely," he said; "I will be with you as much as I can, and there is nothing your mother may want that she shall not have."

Jack looked up gratefully and nodded; the tears were gathering too fast for him to speak.

The door opened and Mrs. Brereton came out hastily. Jack was beside her in a breath; he saw that she expected news.

"We have heard nothing, mother dear. Mr. Roberts came to tell us that Mr. Hinman is trying very hard to find out something in

Washington." Disappointment and relief were both apparent in the changed, yet ever lovely face, which tried to wear a smile of grateful welcome for her husband's friend.

Possibilities worn threadbare by previous discussion, served to occupy their thoughts and conversation until the afternoon began to wane, when Mr. Roberts proposed going again to the post-office.

"Was there a telegram for him?" There was, and he opened it hastily:

Brereton known to have been wounded early in the fight; missing. May be a prisoner; advise giving that suggestion to Mrs. Brereton. Cannot expect anything more for a long time.

R. G. HINMAN.

Jack's legs grew suddenly weak, and he sat down on a convenient barrel. For a minute, not more, Mr. Roberts hesitated, and then handed him the telegram just as it was. He should at least have the comfort of knowing the whole truth and in giving his mother this

shadow of hope; he should know just what foundation it rested on. It would increase his confidence in his friend and rouse him to greater effort to sustain his composure if he was sure he knew all there was to know.

Jack read the few words with devouring eagerness, and then the hand which held the bit of yellow paper dropped weakly beside him, and a mist came before his bright eyes. "Some water, Trenchard," said Mr. Roberts, "I have been a fool; he is but a child, after all. I have given him too much to bear."

The cool contact of the water to his lips, and a few light drops upon his face, brought back the dauntless spirit, stunned for a moment by the dreadful certainty divulged to him; he held out his hand to Mr. Roberts and said softly: "Thank you, sir. Now I know just what I ought to do."

Mr. Roberts walked to the open door; he was less calm than was this plucky boy, and when he turned back into the shop, Jack was

upon his feet and trying to explain to his old friend the postmaster what they had heard.

"Read the telegram, Trenchard, and be sure to show a copy of it to Mr. Thornton when he comes for his mail. Tell any one who asks, that the report is, 'wounded and missing.' After all, we may find this is good news, one of these days; he may have been carried to some field hospital or other shelter. We are not going to give up hope easily, are we, Jack?"

Jack's silence was not broken for a long part of their homeward walk; he was thinking intently. Stopping on the roadside he looked up earnestly at Mr. Roberts. "If father had died from that wound, don't you think there was a greater chance of his being found? Searching parties went over the field; our regiment did not leave the ground in a panic. Some of our surgeons staid as prisoners to care for their own men; if he was carried to a Confederate hospital they would know him. We might hear through them."

"Yes, Jack, your reasoning is good both ways. If he were dead, I think he would have been found; if alive, our surgeons will bring the first news, and doubtless they will be soon exchanged. Non-combatants always are."

"Would it be right to tell mother that?"

"Certainly."

"It would not be deceiving her?"

"Not a bit, dear boy; I think it is most probable. I thought you would be the first to see daylight if there was any."

The distance which had sometimes seemed long between the post-office and his own gate, was terribly short to-day, and they were at home far too quickly, Jack thought. How could he tell his mother?

Mr. Roberts read his thoughts: "Let me try to give the news to Mrs. Brereton."

"Oh! if you only would," said Jack; "but don't deceive her, Mr. Roberts, or she will never take any comfort in what you say afterward."

Mrs. Brereton again came to meet them and

Mr. Roberts stepped in advance of Jack. She saw before he spoke that he had something to tell; there was a chair on the veranda and she sat down suddenly, without speaking. "He has been heard from, Mrs. Brereton, and I believe he has been carried southward as a prisoner."

"Was that what the telegram said?"

"No; only that he had been wounded early in the fight and was not found afterward. Let us hope that he is not only living, but being kindly cared for: our surgeons staid as voluntary prisoners to care for the wounded."

Jack's arms were around her before all these words were said: "Something tells me he is safe, mammy dear; try to believe so, too. I feel sure he is alive and thinking of us all." His kisses seemed to bring a faint glow to her pale cheeks. She rose in an unsteady way, and leaning for a moment on his strong young shoulder, said, with a tearful voice:

"Thank you, Mr. Roberts; I'll have to ask



JACK'S ARMS WERE AROUND HER BEFORE THESE WORDS WERE SAID.

you to excuse me, please," and they saw her go slowly to her room. Jack did not try to follow her; he knew she went to seek strength upon her knees, and he had learned to feel as if angels always waited for her there.

It was now five o'clock in the afternoon, and Mr. Roberts, looking at his watch, said: "I do not like to leave you alone, old fellow, but I suppose I ought to go down by that fifty train. Could I help you if I staid?"

"No, sir, thank you; I suppose there is nothing to be done now but to be patient and wait. I shall never forget your goodness to us," and Jack had hard work to get it out. "Oh! I do thank you for telling me the whole truth."

"At first I feared I had made a mistake; that it was too much for you."

"O, no indeed! This is the only way for me to be of any good to mother. You can easily see that, can't you, Mr. Roberts?"

"Yes; that was my idea from the first; but

has Mrs. Brereton no relative near enough to be a help to you both?"

"No, sir; I have an aunt in Iowa, but I never saw her, and father's people come from Maine; but the only ones left are my grandfather, who is very old, and my Uncle George. After Grand-mamma died, father never went to the old place; I don't think mother knows them very well."

Mr. Roberts again looked at his watch. "I will wait for the six-twenty," he said. "Sit down, Jack, and don't think me rude, but tell me — who is your father in business with?"

"He is not in business with any one now; he was head book-keeper for Mr. Robson, but he lost his position when he went to the war."

Mr. Roberts' face expressed a painful surprise. "What has your mother to depend upon? What do you live on now?"

Jack's story was soon told. "I thought I explained that, Mr. Roberts." Going into careful particulars, the pathetic little history was all made plain.

Growing excited over its unfolding, Mr. Roberts rose and walked up and down as he questioned and listened. With intense satisfaction he heard that the house was theirs without an outside claim; but for the rest, the rich man could form but little conception of how it was all done. Living on what Jack and his mother earned, to guard the precious one hundred and fifty dollars, and the little treasure of that hoarded half-month's pay, seemed to him impossible. How often had such a sum as this been spent for the merest fancy of an idle hour! He was in an atmosphere wholly new to him and could not realize its possibility. Yet Jack had no fears about money, and his father's prolonged absence caused him no anxiety on that account.

"We are doing splendidly so far," he said. "I am earning a good deal of money for a boy, don't you think so? We don't owe a cent, and we have really had enough all the time. Can you see any better way, Mr. Roberts?"

"No one could improve on your own plan, my dear Jack, and I hope I shall never forget what you have proved can be done with so little. Let things rest as they are, and remember to be as proud of your mother as you are of your brave father. She is a model for every soldier's wife in the country. But keep in remembrance that she is to have everything, everything, Jack, she can ever need, and don't work beyond your strength. She would rather lean on you as much as possible, I know, but you'll have to take me for an uncle, and give me a chance to help too. How do you think Uncle Chris sounds for a comfortable old uncle's name?"

"Time is up," interrupted Jack, who knew the train times as well as the station agent. "If you have to go, you'll be obliged to hurry even now, Mr. Roberts."

"Good-by, then, old man; perhaps I may be here again to-morrow. God bless you," and suddenly stooping, to Jack's intense sur-

prise he kissed him and walked off at a great pace.

Going slowly back, Jack saw his mother at the upper window with Flossy in her arms and he waved to the child, who, unconscious of all sorrow, fluttered her chubby hands and pounded on the glass in answer, laughing delightedly at her own noise. Jack's spirits rose; he had forgotten Floss — she could always bring a bright smile to his mother's face. Dolly and she would be the best of comforters.

Tea-time had come again. The light-hearted little ones must be fed, and to be strictly true, Jack's young appetite could not be wholly quenched even by sorrow. He had scarcely eaten what would suffice for a good meal since the morning of the previous day, so he too was ready; and blessed necessity, which is the aid and spur of so many suffering women, gave Mrs. Brereton energy and interest in preparing the food.

They were in the midst of a nearly silent

meal, when Jack heard a strange sound outside, and hurrying out, in nervous expectation of he knew not what, found his pompous friend Michael standing on the veranda. Had the President of the United States suddenly appeared, Jack could hardly have been more astonished than by the liveried figure of this man who seemed to him an essential part of Mr. Thornton's front door. He would have offered to shake hands, but Michael's hands were full, for he held carefully a basket of the most beautiful flowers Jack had ever seen.

"That's for your mother, God bless her!" said Michael, his warm Irish heart having broken down all his grand manners. "Mr. Thornton was going to send Rooney down with 'em, but I would let no one else touch 'em; and could I give 'em to her myself, do you think?"

"Certainly, Michael! Come in and I'll call her at once."

"No; I'll just wait here, if she'll please to come."



"THAT'S FOR YOUR MOTHER," SAID MICHAEL.

Only telling her that Mr. Thornton's Michael wanted to see her, Jack followed her to the door. No sooner had she lifted her gentle, sad eyes to Michael's red and excited face, than the good fellow's color became crimson, and every muscle worked convulsively. Lovely at all times, the beautiful resignation in her heart gave a hallowed charm to Mrs. Brereton's expression and reminded Michael of the face of a saint, and he could just manage to hand her the flowers without crying outright, and he stammered out something about Mr. Thornton's having sent them, while the bulk of his message remained pent-up in his throat.

Mrs. Brereton took the basket with a look of such delighted surprise that Jack blessed Mr. Thornton and thanked the bearer warmly. But Michael's most precious gift he had nearly forgotten in his excitement. Mr. Thornton had received a letter from a newspaper correspondent, directly from the battle field, in which was given all that was known of the gallant

conduct of the regiment, its present status and position, the list of the killed and wounded, and of those who were prisoners, their probable destination. This he had sent by Michael.

"Mr. Thornton says it's every word to be depended on, ma'am, and he is to have every scrap of news about your regiment from time to time, through the same person, and you are to have it the minute it comes, and he bids me inquire particularly how you are."

Jack almost snatched the envelope from Michael's hand, but his mother checked his eagerness and found calmness enough to cordially thank and fully answer the earnest questions of poor Mike. Bidding Jack carry the flowers into the house she held out her hand and said: "I am grateful to you also, Michael, for your kindness to my boy."

"Lord love you, ma'am," said the man, "he's as good as sunshine on a rainy day. You nor no one else ever saw such a boy! Why, Mr. Thornton would give his eyes for him. You

may not know that his chief trouble in this world is his only son, and if he ever coveted anything in his life it is your son Jack, Mrs. Brereton; and all ever he can do for him he surely will; you may count on that. He always points him out to visitors and says, 'That's the best boy I ever saw.' Now ain't that a comfort to you in your trouble, ma'am?"

"It is indeed, Michael, it is indeed. God alone knows what I should do without him."

Five minutes after Michael had disappeared the mother and son were devouring the graphic, brilliant letter of Mr. Thornton's correspondent, and through it they followed the fight from its bold beginning to its sad end with breathless haste. What they read of the wounded was only partly true, for details of what befell within the Confederate lines were unobtainable, and we will rather follow our soldier's real adventures, than with them read a faulty history.

Early in the fight, before the fearful confu-

sion of the general battle had reached its height, Brereton had fallen, wounded in the leg, not far above the knee. He fell just where he had been struck and lay right in the onward track of the advancing troops; but with difficulty he rolled himself inward toward a gulley, near a broken fence.

Many wounded and some dead men lay within the radius in which he could clearly discern; beyond, things dim and uncertain were scattered everywhere; were they men? He could not tell.

The fierce *mêlée* grew more fierce; smoke, cries, sounds of shot and shell, red glare, dying in dull heavy clouds of grimy mist, flags faintly seen at intervals when the wind blew back the gray curtain — all this he watched with a gaze ever weakening, yet ever more painfully intent.

Then came a noise like the rush of a mad sea, and past him fled thousands of defeated and bewildered men, scarce knowing where they went. The cloud lifted little by little as

the artillery hushed its awful roar, the smoke moved in a fitful drooping line like a heavy drapery partially drawn, and slowly dispersed, drifted in torn fragments, hither and thither, and showed him the wide plain.

By and by more orderly and solid detachments of troops passed on, near or far, but always one way, going back, going back; his weak senses gathered this much at least: the battle was lost and his defeated comrades were in fast retreat.

No one saw him, no one heard him; he was to be left there on that terrible field. Slowly it came to him, but it was surely true. He had many to bear him company, but no one spoke, none cast a glance his way; if any lived, they testified to their existence only by an occasional groan.

Fainter and fainter grew his perceptions; the strange murmur of the departing hosts sounded but weakly in his dull ears; he ceased to watch the retreating figures of his own corps, or mark

the advance of their successful foes; and when he next was conscious of anything, he was lying on some straw, in a jolting farm wagon, heavily laden with suffering men, going on their way to Sudley Church, which had been turned into a temporary hospital, and where the brave, unselfish surgeons of the defeated Federal army made themselves willing prisoners, for the sake of their otherwise deserted comrades. These were indeed the true heroes of this dark day — those maimed and bleeding prisoners and their generous physicians.

VIII.

A VISIT FROM CORPORAL AMOS.

SUDLEY CHURCH was a place of terrible sights and sounds, and poor John Brereton had his full share of the personal bodily pain which tormented those around him; but his loving wife and boy would have hailed with joy the certainty that he lived and was receiving such care as the place and time permitted.

Many of the pews had been removed to facilitate the surgeons' work and placed outside the church, under the shadow of its walls; they were used as temporary couches for the wounded, where they might wait their turn for removal within. And on one of these lay our soldier. Oh! how he longed for water, not alone to drink, but for the refreshment of its touch upon his forehead and burning cheeks;

there is no thirst like that which follows a gunshot wound.

With what a yearning desire his thoughts turned homeward! The beloved faces rose clear and life-like before him, until to his weakened fancy they seemed to actually bend over him.

Thus lying, half-aware of his real condition, half-cheated into a vision of the dear ones far away, he closed his weary eyes, hoping sleep might come, and trying to shut out the horrid picture of a poor Zouave who lay dying beside him.

Slowly he lost consciousness, and was only roused by the sudden light of a lantern thrust close to his face. Two surgeons examined him, without troubling him with questions, while an officer in the gray uniform of the Confederate army made a note of his regiment and condition. The lantern showed but dimly what they desired to see; there was a discussion about amputation, but mercifully Brereton only half-

comprehended what was said. The elder man strenuously opposed any present operation, and lifting the poor fellow's head, supported it upon his arm and put a canteen of water to his lips. It was the most delicious drink he ever took in his life, and revived by the long draught he said: "Thank you," with a fervor which was unmistakable. The old doctor said kindly: "I wish I had some food for you, but that is not obtainable. Keep up your courage, and it will come by and by. You'll be able to keep that leg, I think, and will feel stronger to-morrow. Meantime, we will take this poor fellow out of your way; you are none the better for his close company." Raising the Zouave, they laid him on the ground, a little nearer the church wall, and Brereton saw that he was quite dead, and could dimly discern his distorted face, surmounted by the red fez, which gave him a ghastly and horrible grotesqueness.

While they were dressing his wound he made out clearly that it was a Federal surgeon

who was caring for him, and catching his arm, he whispered: "Where am I to go?"

"You are a prisoner, and will probably be sent farther South to-morrow."

"And you, Doctor?"

"I am a prisoner too, but voluntarily, and being a non-combatant, am likely to have an early exchange."

"Doctor," said Brereton, pulling weakly at his coat, "could you get a line to my wife?"

"I can try, but I am afraid it won't be very soon." He pulled out a note-book and took the name and address.

"Just tell her I am alive, and where they send me, if you know."

"I won't forget. I will see you to-morrow if I can, but we have no idea what will be done with us. Good-night."

The figures moved away into the darkness, the twinkling lantern pausing over many a prostrate form, and it was not Brereton's good fortune to see the kind surgeon again.

The night was one of suffering and exhaustion; he could not turn; he lay on the narrow hard seat of the high-backed pew, as rigid as if he were in a coffin; he was growing weaker and weaker from hunger, but he could think with some clearness, and realized his position and surroundings. In the early morning he was lifted into a wagon filled with straw and sent slowly on his weary journey toward Richmond, helpless in every way, without even the power to raise himself to take the welcome milk which was distributed before they made their first start. And here we must leave him, for our story is Jack's story, not his father's.

The eventful day which had at once killed hope and enkindled it again, by first showing them that they had no possible chance of seeing their soldier soon, and then bringing them ground for faith in his being yet alive and pointing to a possible day of reunion, was followed by a bright morning, at the dawn of

which Jack sprang out of bed and made ready for his work.

At the first sound his mother roused nervously. "What are you doing, Jack?"

"I thought I had better go to work, mother dear. I feel as if it was more important than ever now. Can you spare me?"

"Yes, son; you are right. I will get up and see to your breakfast at once."

"No, please don't; there is plenty of milk and bread and butter downstairs, and I want you to take what rest you can to-day. You can have a jolly good lunch ready for me when I get home, mammy dear." He came, as he spoke, to kiss her "good-by," and she held his face close to hers long enough to ask a silent blessing on his dear head, and then let him close the door between their rooms and lay still as he had asked her to do.

He made his wholesome breakfast hastily, for, by his own determination, he had two errands before he went to Mr. Holtin's. He

ran down to the station and bought a morning paper for his mother, knowing well how she would long for every printed word; then he stopped to ask 'Becca to go to the house, and gave her the paper to carry with her. "Don't call anybody," Jack said, "but just slip in the kitchen way (I left the door unlocked) and have everything ready when mother comes down, and try to keep her from getting tired if you can, 'Becca."

"Indeed I will, Jack, and you are not to talk to me about pay, neither, mind that! It won't hurt me to help Mrs. Brereton through her trouble; she has been the best friend me and my mother ever had. When your father's back safe and sound, please God, you can look out for my asking big wages, and standing up for myself."

Jack had no hesitancy in letting 'Becca show her gratitude to his mother in her own honest way, and said: "All right, 'Becca, for this day it is agreed that you work for love, and I thank

you very much." After getting a little way on his road he turned back. "There are some lovely flowers in the cool closet near the milk; get them out and have them on the table for mother to see."

"Yes, I'll remember," said Rebecca, and starting in the opposite direction, added in her mind a word of heart-felt praise for the boy.

Mr. Holtin, looking out of the window, was surprised to see Jack at work, and hastened down to speak with him. "This is not necessary, Jack," he said; "I did not expect you this week. Have you received any news?"

Jack gave the substance of what they had heard, and explained why he thought he ought at once to resume his labor. Mr. Holtin offered him a cordial hand. "You are wholly right, my boy," he said, "though between us there would have been no counting of days in times like these; but beside the money you are so anxious to earn, nothing can be so good for keeping up your own courage and your mother's

strength, as to resume your ordinary habits and live as useful lives as you can. You must try to forget we are pupil and master and come freely to me for advice and help; you have shown yourself so much of a man that I can not treat you as a child any more."

Jack's eyes glistened, and he gave the lawn some rather severe and dangerous rakings, which he had to smooth down again, but he could only say: "Thank you, sir," and hope that Mr. Holtin understood how grateful he was for such helpful words.

Weeks passed, and life settled into its old lines, except for the ever fresh and ever more terrible war news, and for the great change in Mrs. Brereton; she grew paler and thinner day by day, until Jack used to say, trying to jest over what sorely troubled him: "Mammy dear, you make me think of the snow melting before the sun; some day I'll come home and you will have vanished altogether." She was very playful with the little girls, active to a degree which

put all the rest of her busy life to shame, for she could not keep still; and no boy ever had a more ideal comrade than Jack found in her, but through it all she was wearing away, under the longing and suspense and pain which never left her heart.

Suddenly, as if it dropped from the heavens above them, one day a letter came, and it read thus:

WASHINGTON, D. C., *August 20, 1861.*

DEAR MADAM:

On the night after the battle of Bull Run, I saw your husband at Sudley Church, Va. He was a prisoner, and severely wounded in the leg, but I have full confidence that he will survive and regain the use of the limb. I personally examined the wound, and did what I could to relieve him.

He begged me to communicate with you and give you such comfort as this opinion might bring. I endeavored to see him a second time, but he was carried toward Richmond early the next morning, and I had no means of hearing how he was.

This is the first opportunity I have had to fulfill my promise, and I fear you have been without direct news of him until now, so that at this late day it

may be a relief to receive even this unsatisfactory report.

I trust he will be exchanged at an early day, and restored to those who love him.

Very sincerely yours,

ROGER SEATON,

Surgeon U. S. A.

This letter was like a shower in time of drought; it assured them of a reasonable ground of hope, and gave the endorsement of a medical man to the chances of his outliving his suffering.

The unceasing kindness of Mr. Thornton, who was never done sending Mrs. Brereton delicacies and wine and flowers, made Jack hasten to tell him of this bit of comfort, and his dear "Uncle Chris," with whom he was in constant communication, must be told also. Friends they had in abundance, and they were those who could on the one hand, like Mrs. Paxson and poor 'Becca, aid by personal endeavor with kindly hands, or, like these two rich and powerful men, bring the resources of

great influence to their assistance. Jack hardly knew which gave him most joy, the sense of certainty that his mother could command such help, or the fact that so far, by God's help and their own labor, they owed no one anything but love and gratitude.

August passed, and September days were half-over, when a strange adventure befell Jack, which was far pleasanter to think of, after it was a thing of the past, than while it was in progress. It came on a Sunday, one of those on which 'Becca and Jack kept house, and all his life through it will remain fresh in his memory, and in these days his children love to hear him talk of it.

The day was still, and calm, and bright; a blue haze was on the hills, and soft warmth in the air, a gentle look of resignation over all the green things of the earth, abiding God's will in this autumn time, when their growth was ended, and their hour to die drew near. Mrs. Brereton had been in church perhaps a quarter

of an hour, and Jack sat on the front steps, trying, after his Sunday fashion, to plan out his work for the coming week, and spying out the first red and yellow leaves which began to show themselves here and there, with a longing wonder whether his father might come back ere they fell, when he was startled by seeing 'Becca standing behind him. He had noticed that she did not seem happy when she came, and that she was less able to please the children than usual, and now she stood looking nervously up the road.

"Jack," she said, "did you ever hear tell of them Zouavers, up to Tuckahoe?"

"No," said Jack; "what are they?"

"Well, they're kind of soldiers, dressed up like fantasticals."

"What are fantasticals?" again questioned Jack, more and more puzzled.

"Oh! queer people, dressed up. I seen 'em onct in a purcession to New York. Well, them Zouavers is a awful bad lot, and my father said

for you and me to be careful, and if we saw any of 'em about to go right in and lock the door."

"Why, what could they do to us, 'Becca?"



"DID YOU EVER HEAR TELL OF THEM ZOUAVERS?"

If they are soldiers they are all right. I remember now that Col. Ellsworth's men were called Zouaves, and I believe they were rather rough, but they would not harm us."

“Oh! you don’t know anything about it, Jack. My father read it out of the Herald newspaper, and my cousin that’s a fireman on the railroad, says that the people up the road is scared to death of ’em. They won’t stay in camp, not for nobody, and they go about and take all they can find to eat. They’ll snatch a pot right off the fire and carry off folks’ dinners, and last week twenty of ’em went over to Mar’nick to the camp meeting, and took every blessed thing in the whole camp; the camp-meeteners hadn’t so much as a loaf of bread left when they cleared out. O, Jack! I’m awful skeered of ’em, and this house is so kinder lonely. Hadn’t we better go in and lock up now?”

Jack thought the matter over; it certainly did not sound pleasantly to hear that such visitors might appear. After a minute or two, he said: “No, ’Becca. If we locked up, they could easily get in by the parlor windows. Father always said those windows could be very

easily opened, and then we should be worse off, for they would see we were afraid and be angry beside. Anyhow, I don't see what should bring them way down here, and if they did come, I don't believe any United States soldiers would hurt us. It doesn't sound to me like a true story, 'Becca. You better stay upstairs with Baby and Dolly, and if anybody comes you can lock the door and keep still."

"They might kill you, Jack."

"Oh! never, Beck. What on earth would they kill a fellow like me for? Don't let's talk about such things and get scared, or we'll behave like geese if anything does happen. You've made me feel queer as it is, and you see I would have to stay and stick it out, no matter what came, for there is nobody else to take care of anything; and beside father made me a sort of a soldier, and I'm under a solemn promise."

"Well, couldn't you spare me to go home, Jack?"

"No, 'Becca; I think mother would feel very badly if you left the children, and you know she has trouble enough already."

'Becca knew full well that she ought to stay; her better feelings prevailed as she looked about her and saw only the loveliness of a perfect September day, and heard nothing more terrible than the sweet autumnal notes of a song-sparrow, so she went back into the house, and took Dolly upstairs to sit beside Baby.

Jack's peace however, was gone, and in its place a nervous, eerie sensation had possession of him, which he could not fight off. The clear crow of his favorite old Captain Bragg, declaring himself easily monarch of the small poultry kingdom, called him toward the yard, and he stood among the pretty flock and amused himself with their droll ways, as he threw some corn among them. Suddenly his excited perceptions caught a sound altogether new to his ears; it was the steady, rythmical sound made by the tread of men, marching in quick time;

a curious beat in unison, like machinery in motion, and above it, he heard a wild sort of song rolling out on the still air, in a tone of reckless jollity altogether in sharp contrast with the hush of the sweet country place, keeping God's holy day in peace.

Jack felt at once that a great trial was coming upon him; something told him that those swift-coming steps would surely stop at his gate. He was a good boy, and trained from the time he could think at all, to ask God's help and blessing, and since his father's departure, "saying his prayers" had gained a new meaning; but now he learned in an instant, what trust in God and a passionate appeal for his help meant. Words he had none, but a silent cry went up to Heaven, heard by his Heavenly Father, though his tongue was dumb; he asked, he knew not how, for protection to his baby sisters, and that he should be able to do his duty. He feared much, though he hardly knew what; a sickening dread lest he should

lose his self-control, overwhelmed him. Could it be possible that he would run away? For a minute it seemed as if he could not resist the impulse. The struggle was but for a moment, yet Jack felt as if half an hour had passed.

With a tremendous effort Jack turned back, and going up the steps of the front veranda, stood erect, facing the road. He knew he had conquered, and grew able to think and see.

Tramp, tramp, tramp they came, and at the gate stood six or eight white-turbaned men, with red uniforms, and big baggy trousers hanging over gaitered leggings. They were not in the least like Jack's idea of soldiers. The song had ceased; tramp, tramp, tramp, the few grew into the many, and Jack had no idea how many men he saw.

Poor, proud old Captain Bragg gave a loud, defiant crow; over the fence, disdaining to open the gate, scrambled and leaped the crowd, talking loudly, laughing, pushing one another aside, in their race for the door. Jack heard

a faint scream overhead and knew that 'Becca had seen her fears realized.

"Here, youngster, find that rooster for us; come — hustle, jump, be quick!"

"What do you want of him?" said Jack in as energetic a tone as he could muster.

"Never you mind, Sonny," said one big fellow, taking him by the shoulder; "you'd better wheel about and do as you're told."

Two or three men pushed past the boy into the house. Jack was at his wits' end; within were the little girls; anything outside had better go than have the house ransacked.

Loudly again crew the cock. "Ah! there you are, are you?" shouted one of the freebooters, and leading the way to the tidy little inclosure, was followed by fully half of the party, and Jack knew by the wild cries of the hens, that they were being caught and killed. Wise enough not to interfere in their behalf, he put all his energies into an effort to get a hearing from one of the mad crowd left nearer

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"AT THE GATE STOOD SIX OR EIGHT WHITE-TURBANED MEN."

him. Among them stood a man, wearing the chevrons of a corporal on his sleeve; he did little more than laugh at the others, and seemed to be heedless of his share of the plunder.

Jack, white as his broad Sunday collar walked up to him, and touched his sleeve, "Please, sir," he said, "my father is a soldier. He has gone to the war; my mother is at church, and my two little sisters are upstairs, and I am the only one to take care of them; would you please ask the soldiers not to frighten them?"

The man turned and looked full at the slender, straight young figure and resolute face of the lad, and said:

"Well done, young feller! you're a plucky one. Do you know who you're talking to? Do you know who we are? We've helped ourselves to our own provender in this neighborhood for some time now, and by George, you're the first man who hasn't shown the white

feather. Why, boy alive, we're the famous Fire Zouaves, and I am Corporal Amos! Don't frighten the babies, eh? Well, that's a joke worth telling."

Jack stood his ground; he had spoken, and not been killed on the spot; he would try again. There was something in the man's eyes which was reassuring to our young soldier. His knees shook a little, but he went on:

"Please, Corporal, two or three of your men are inside now, and if you would only go in and see what they are doing. We are trying to keep things nice until father comes back, and there is nothing worth taking except a very few things, like mother's wedding spoons and her watch; please don't let them take that. Please don't let them do any harm."

"You seem to think I'm the best of the lot, monkey; that's not the general opinion, but you deserve some help, for you're a plucky one and no mistake."

"Well, you see, Corporal, I feel sure the men

would feel different, if they knew father was a soldier," said Jack. "If you would just tell them that, it might do some good."

Corporal Amos led the way with unerring instinct, and strode into the kitchen. Already confusion reigned, and three or four men were ransacking every corner. Instantly pouncing upon Jack, one of them took him by the collar. "Here, show us your dinner! Where is your Sunday dinner? Quick now."

"We don't have dinner now father's gone; we are trying to save everything for him," said Jack.

"Here, come off, boys," said Corporal Amos in a strong voice which claimed their attention; "this boy has got the grit of Andrew Jackson, and he tells the truth. Let the house alone and don't bother him. His daddy has gone to the war, and he's commander-in-chief. You've got all his chickens, and that's enough."

The men looked at Jack, and into the open drawers and closets which contained so little,

and felt some spark of dead humanity rising in their breasts.

A sad crying was heard from the floor above.

“Wait a minute,” said Jack, with the most straightforward simplicity; “wait until I go upstairs and get my little sisters; they are frightened; then I’ll give you all I have; father would not grudge anything to soldiers.”

He darted upstairs, and returned almost as quickly, with the two little girls, both of whom were crying, Baby in his arms and Dolly holding on to his jacket.

The robbers of the chicken yard began to crowd into the house also. “Wait a minute,” said Jack again; “would you like some gingerbread and milk? I have plenty of gingerbread, and a good deal of milk, and if you would ask the men to go out on the piazza, Corporal, I’ll bring it to them. Would you mind holding Flossy a minute?”

A queer look crept over the bold man’s face;

something gathered in his eyes which would not stay there, but fell in two large unwonted drops, such as had not touched his cheeks in many a year; he took the frightened child in his arms, as gently as her mother could have done, and ordered his men, themselves silenced and bewildered by this strange ending to a marauding expedition, to come out of the house. They gathered in a puzzled group upon the little veranda, and a minute or two sufficed for Jack's preparations, to entertain these extraordinary guests. He came out with a pail of milk and a dipper, followed by Dolly carrying a large wire sieve on which their mother had left her delicate ginger cakes to cool, the night before. Jack made an exchange; took Flossy and gave the pail to the corporal, and then stood in the door to see the men enjoy the refreshment he had provided.

In the midst of this rare lunch Mrs. Brereton appeared at the gate.

"Corporal," said Jack, "that's my mother;

would you please go and tell her about it; she'll be scared to death to see you all here."

Unconscious Jack, aided and blessed as he had prayed he might be, had put his precious mother under the rude and vice-hardened man's protection, and given him the proudest moment of his life. Mrs. Brereton stood still at the gate, trembling with alarm.

"Come in, madam," said the corporal; "don't be frightened, your boy has given my men a little refreshment; they have killed your chickens. I couldn't help that; you see they must have something; but that youngster of yours has taken the starch out of them as completely as ever I see anything done in this world, and there is nothing wrong inside."

Utterly dazed, Mrs. Brereton made no answer, but walked forward beside the untamable Zouave, whose name was a terror to his own companions, her delicate loveliness enhanced by his uncouth and strange appearance. On the threshold and on the ground

before the steps lay the bags filled with the dead fowls, and their blood bespattered the neat floor of the veranda. The wild-looking men scrambled to their feet, in doubt what might happen next, seeing Corporal Amos so evidently taking care of such a dainty lady.

Flossy held out her arms, and Dolly took courage to pass between the men to meet her mother. The soldiers gathered up their booty and stood irresolute, not knowing what to do.

"Fall in. About face. Forward, march," ordered Corporal Amos, and they wheeled into line and with the tramp which had so terrified Jack, marched downward to the gate, apparently glad of a solution to their puzzling position.

"Madam," said the corporal, "your boy has saved your property, and done me more good than a parson. What's your name, Kid?"

"Jack Brereton."

"Well, shake hands, Jack Brereton; you are the first man that ever got the better of Cor-

poral Amos, and don't you forget it! You'll have no more trouble with the Zouaves, I'll guarantee."

Mrs. Brereton, still amazed by all she saw, and unable to rid herself of the fright she had received with that first vivid picture, seen from the gate, tried to respond to the evident kindness in the man's tone and manner.

"Thank you," she said, "we are lonely and unprotected, and I should be glad to think they would not come again."

"Be satisfied about that, ma'am; they've made their last visit here;" and he ran swiftly forward, leaped the low fence and joined his men, now tramping back toward their camp.

IX.

JACK DECIDES TO LEAVE SCHOOL.

STEPPING over her soiled veranda, Mrs. Brereton led the way into the disordered kitchen, where everything lay strewn about in wild confusion. She felt a sort of faintness coming over her at the evidences of what Jack had encountered single-handed.

“Where is 'Becca?” she asked.

“I really don't know, mother; I heard her scream just as the men came toward the house, and when the children cried and I went up for them, she was nowhere to be seen.”

Mrs. Brereton looked about hopelessly for a moment and then said: “I must go and change my dress. Bring the children up, and we will look for her.”

No sign of the missing 'Becca could they find,

until Dolly suddenly said, pointing to the ladder which led to the loft: "'Becca went up there when the ugly men came." And there, sure enough, they found her, crouching under the lower eaves, and when Jack opened the narrow door which led to her hiding-place, she greeted him with a loud scream. Assured that the dreaded "Zouavers" were all gone, she was coaxed by Mrs. Brereton's earnest entreaties to come down slowly, pausing on every step, and seeming to doubt the evidences of her own senses, that no fiery coats or white turbans were in sight.

Once in the kitchen, her housewifely instincts helped her to recover her equilibrium; the desire to restore order out of such a chaos, mastered her alarm so that she could go to work. And after Jack saw her really begin in earnest, he made his sad pilgrimage to his silent poultry yard, in which not one fowl remained. A few half-grown little chicks had been slain in pure wantonness, and left with

twisted necks, lying here and there, but not one comely hen remained to greet him. Gathering up the bodies of his pets, Jack sadly closed the gate and went into the house, really disheartened and out of courage. Gradually, however, under his mother's cheering influence, he realized more fully what might have been the result had the minds of these lawless men taken a different bent, and in the light of her gratitude, the loss of his poultry looked far less distressing.

The remainder of the day was taken up with efforts to restore the house to its wonted order, and, Sunday though it was, 'Becca and Mrs. Brereton were vigorously busy until the early sundown of the autumn day. Jack removed the blood stains from the veranda and felt as if he were performing some mysterious funeral rites for Captain Bragg and his plump, gray-feathered wives.

These raids of the far-too-active Zouaves always raised a great stir in the direction of

their march, and before night, hearing of their visit to the Brereton cottage, many people came to know whether they had done any serious injury, and Mrs. Brereton was glad when the evening was over and the trying subject could be dropped.

Somehow, although Mrs. Brereton said little to rouse it, the vigorous questioning of her visitors drew out a clear showing of Jack's manly conduct, and a flood of praise poured in upon him which surprised him very much. When the story reached Mr. Thornton's ears, he rode down to congratulate Jack and see for himself the true state of the case, and he was not sparing of his warm commendation.

"Why, Mr. Thornton," said Jack, "it's all a mistake. When I first saw them, to tell you the truth, it was all I could do to keep from running away."

"Ah! but you didn't. That's what we are all proud of, Jack."

Fortunately for the boy, he could not see for

himself that there was any glory in standing by the house and his little sisters ; he had too vivid a remembrance of his temptation to cowardice to be very much puffed up by the view other people took of his conduct, and was more influenced by his mother's direct tendering of thanks for their release from peril, to God who had protected them. Jack would not have been Jack if he had been able to see himself as others saw him.

On the next Sunday morning he was startled by a vigorous crowing in the direction of the chicken-house, and hurriedly getting on some clothes, he went out to see what it meant. On the gate of the poultry-yard was a piece of fool's-cap paper, with a scrawling inscription :

“ With the compliments of Corporal Amos. Hope they're the right breed. Couldn't find any 'round Tuckahoe, or would have sent them sooner.”

Stolen, Jack was sure these pretty creatures were, but wherever they came from, he was

powerless to do anything more than accept them, and they were as fine "Plymouth Rocks" as he had ever seen ; a big, proud-looking cock and six fat motherly hens, and it was delightful once more to see the deserted place occupied. There was a pleasure, too, in receiving this token of good-will from one whose character had been made plain to him by the startling descriptions of the people who came to inquire about what they called "the Zouaves' raid."

Jack's "Uncle Chris" gained a very clear idea of the whole thing by quietly questioning the boy as to each step of the approach and retreat. He knew well that he received the unvarnished truth, and he grew more than ever envious of Jack's parents, and wished for some chance to serve him. The only thing he could do at the present time was to help restock the still wofully diminished poultry yard, and in a few days a trio of rare birds, the like of which Jack had never seen, arrived by express, and the village carpenter came with

an order from Mr. Roberts to build a separate "run" for them. Jack's eyes danced with delight; if he could raise stock from these birds he could command a high price even for the eggs, and there were none such in all the neighborhood.

When Mr. Roberts came to examine the birds in their new quarters, Jack laughed and said: "It is almost worth having a visit from the corporal to own these beauties; but I am afraid father will miss old Captain Bragg, he was so fond of him. He raised him from a chick, and he had so many funny ways."

Mr. Roberts envied Jack's hopeful spirit, and wished that he felt any confidence in his father's return to mourn over Captain Bragg's loss. Many prisoners and wounded men had died since that awful day in July; who could tell what Brereton's fate had been?

A grave question now rose in Jack's mind: school or no school? What more could he do?

The care of Mr. Holtin's grounds must end with the cold weather; even now there was but little to be done. The grass rarely required cutting, and to gather the dying leaves was the chief work. The Thornhill family would go to New York before Christmas; what was he to do to fill these lost places? School began on the twenty-second of September, and he must decide before that.

At last he took courage, and when he handed the mail to Michael he asked him to inquire if it was a convenient time for Mr. Thornton to see him. In a moment Michael returned and said Mr. Thornton would see him in the study; and there Jack found his ever kind employer, seated at a large writing table covered with books and papers.

Without rising, Mr. Thornton held out his hand and with a cordial smile said: "Any news from your father?"

"No, sir," said Jack, embarrassed.

"I was in hopes you had come with good

tidings. I am sorry they are so long in coming. Well, what can I do for you? I see you have something very weighty on your mind."

"I only want advice, Mr. Thornton. Do you think I ought to go back to school this winter?"

"Why, bless my soul, yes! Why not?"

"Well, you see, Mr. Thornton, I must earn money. My work at Mr. Holtin's is nearly over, and when you go to New York the mail carrying will stop; I must find something else to do, and it would be almost impossible for me to find early and late jobs in winter, before and after school, as I was able to do this summer. Don't you see how it will be, Mr. Thornton?"

"Oh! as far as what you earn here, that will go on just the same; there will always be something to be brought up to the house."

"No, no, Mr. Thornton," said proud Jack, coloring crimson. "I am too young to be a pensioner; that would not do at all, but if you can

advise me about some other real work, where the money could be honestly earned, I should be very glad, and I could tell in a minute whether I was able to do it or not, and whether it meant school or no school."

Mr. Thornton rose and walked up and down the long room several times, and then said: "I see what you mean, and you are right, Jack; doing work as you desire to do it is the most priceless education you can get; it is indeed leading you out into the right way. Have you Latin enough to know what education means? If you have not, look up *educo* in your dictionary and see. Your three months' service is going to be a famous leading forth and drawing out for you, worth more than any other schooling could have been. And since independence and power to aid your mother is so important to you, I agree with you, that until your father's fate is ascertained, or he can return to you, paying employment is the first thing to be considered, and we will

find it if we can. What does Mr. Roberts say?"

"I haven't laid the matter before him; the truth is, Mr. Thornton," and Jack blushed, "he wants to do too much for me, and I am afraid to tell him my difficulties. I believe he would pay me for going to school if I would let him."

"I daresay, I daresay," said Mr. Thornton thoughtfully; "he is very rich and almost alone in the world, and he is very fond of you, Jack. But he is a very clear-headed man of business, and I would ask him; be frank and tell him just what you feel."

"School begins next Monday, and I wanted to make up my mind before the beginning of the term. I hope I have not troubled you?"

"Not at all, not at all; come as often as you like, and remember if I should forget to speak of it later, that my books are always at your service. If you should decide against school, read all you can, take anything you want from here and keep them as long as you like; only

be careful that Dolly's fingers do not meddle with them."

Jack thanked him and went on his homeward way, but Mr. Thornton continued his restless walk up and down, up and down the long, book-walled room, evidently thinking intently. After half an hour he ordered his horse and rode down to the post-office, where, calling to an idle boy to hold the bridle, he dismounted and entered the queer little shop, where every thing could be bought, from a straw hat to a plough, and where a barrel of flour and a paper of pins were equally easy to find. Surprised to see him, Trenchard was greatly interested when Mr. Thornton asked to be allowed to go into the little private den where the mail was kept, and talk with him privately. The conversation was not a very long one, and when it was over, Mr. Thornton tossed a quarter to the waiting boy, rode directly back to Thornhill, wrote a letter to Christopher Roberts, Esq., and sent it down to the evening mail.

Whether this visit and letter had anything to do with a notice which Jack saw posted above the hole where letters were delivered when he made his daily inquiry for his master, I cannot tell you. Mr. Thornton never spoke of it to any one, neither did Mr. Roberts, and that these two gentlemen had combined to propose that Trenchard should have a clerk and then made it easy for him to pay for his services, I have no right to say. However, there was the notice, duly posted : "Wanted, an active boy of about fifteen, to assist in the post-office and store, salary six dollars per week."

Jack started when he saw this notice which seemed like a hand beckoning to him. If he could only get that place! Looking around, he saw Trenchard watching him while he read it.

"I suppose you will be going back to school or you would like that kind of work, wouldn't you, Jack? Several boys has 'plied for the situation, but nobody has come along that suits

me so far." A very subtle, wily man old Trenchard had suddenly become!

"What hours would he have to keep?"

"Well, I don't need help as early as some folks does, nor so late neither; from about eight to six would do for me, and if you wanted the place, why I'd 'low you a little extra time when you went home for your dinner to do up your chores and things, for it's always pretty dull about noontime in Ruremont."

"Are you sure that I could do the work, Mr. Trenchard?"

"Oh! I guess so. It's more to be honest and careful than anything else; count stamps and sell 'em, weigh letters and packages, etc., and to learn prices and know how to give exact measure in the store. You can write a first-rate hand and I ain't afraid but you would get along well enough, if you thought it was best to leave school so soon."

"Until father gets back I must earn money, and I should not hesitate to leave school if I

could get steady work and good pay like this. If mother approves, I will be very thankful to take it, Mr. Trenchard, and if I could get a little extra time at noon, I don't see any reason against it."

"Well, yes," said the postmaster with a quizzical smile, "it does look almost as if the place was made for you, Jack, it suits you so nicely, don't it? Anyhow, you had better go home and see what Mis' Brereton says about it, and if she thinks best you can come to work on Monday."

Jack paused. "There's Mr. Thornton's mail," he said thoughtfully; "he will want to have that delivered for a month or so more, and I know he would rather not look for another boy so late in the year."

"Well, yes" (the postmaster could hardly begin a sentence without his favorite word), "that is to be considered, but I guess I could spare you to take that up; it's sort of post-office business, any way. I think we can man-

age about that. I am sorry your mother don't get no letter."

Turning to wait on an incoming customer, he left Jack to his own reflections, which quickly sent him home to consult with his mother. Difficulties lay in his way. It would be quite dark when he reached home in the short winter days, and what he could not accomplish by lantern light must be done at noon. By the time he came in sight of his own gate he had planned everything, so that he could give his mother a favorable view of the scheme, and after a quiet talk of half an hour it was decided that he should accept this blessed opportunity of help.

In the evening Jack went to tell Mr. Holtin that he should not be able to return to school, and that he would give an early morning hour occasionally to Mr. Holtin's grounds until frost was hard enough to make it unnecessary.

"Of course I don't expect any pay for it, Mr. Holtin, for it won't be worth anything,

but I would like to feel I had finished the season properly."

"You come when you can, Jack, to straighten things out for me, and come twice a week in the evening and bring me a lesson in your Latin grammar or your algebra, and we will call it square."

"Could I do that, Mr. Holtin?"

"Of course you can, and be more than welcome, Jack; and you can accomplish a great deal if you give your attention to it. You will be surprised at your own progress."

"I don't think any boy ever had such good luck as I have," said Jack. "I believe I might keep up with the class if I tried hard. Oh! thank you very much, Mr. Holtin."

Mr. Holtin shook hands, and Jack went home at racing speed to tell his good news.

On Monday, at eight o'clock sharp, Jack entered the familiar "store" and was admitted into the sacred precincts behind the glazed frame

of boxes which indicated the post-office. He felt a little awed at first, as no one was ever allowed to enter the little inclosure except Mr. Thornton; but he soon began to see into the postmaster's simple ways of sorting and stamping, and consumed the first hour in putting the Ruremont stamp on incoming and outgoing letters; it seemed much like some childish sort of play, as the soft pit-pat, pit-pat fell upon letter after letter.

It all came easily within his power of comprehension, and before long the village people were rejoiced when prompt, sharp-eyed Jack appeared at the place of delivery instead of slow, spectacled Mr. Trenchard, who always had to look twice before he was sure he was right.

Mr. Thornton showed much interest in his new duties and expressed great pleasure in Jack's finding such suitable work so quickly, and if he knew more than he said about it all, no one was harmed by his silence, and I think he

was as happy as Jack himself over the evident good result. "Uncle Chris," too, highly approved of the plan, and came in occasionally to see how Jack looked at the delivery window, and amused himself by buying a great many more stamps than he could easily use.

One dull day early in October, Jack was sorting out the mail, when, in the middle of a handful of letters, he saw one without an envelope, and written on common wrapping paper which at once attracted his attention, and turning it over, he read with eager delight the penciled address. He uttered some involuntary exclamation of astonishment in such a strange voice that Mr. Trenchard hastily opened the narrow dividing door and asked what ailed him.

"Look, Mr. Trenchard! Look at that! It is from my father!"

To convey an idea of what Jack's voice expressed would be impossible; each word was louder than the last, until "Father" could be heard out on the roadside.

His old friend snatched the dirty bit of yellow paper from his hand and scanned it curiously on either side.

"Well, yes," he said, "I do believe you're right. Put on your hat and go straight home to your mother. I'll attend to the mail."

Jack needed no second bidding, but catching up his cap was out of sight in a moment. Amazed to hear his footsteps at that hour, Mrs. Brereton came to meet him.

"Mother!" he cried, "mother, look here!" He held the precious bit of paper as far in advance of him as the length of his arm could permit, and she took it with trembling fingers. Then standing together, his arm about her waist, they read:

MILITARY PRISON, RICHMOND, Va.

[*September, 1861*]

DEAR WIFE:

I hope there is a chance that this will reach you. I am not sure of the day of the month, but I think it must be the twentieth or the twenty-first. I can only say a few words of love and longing. Though



“LOOK ! IT’S FROM MY FATHER !”

lame, I am well. We hear rumors that there will be an exchange of prisoners before long; God grant it may come soon. I hardly dare to send messages to the children; sometimes I dream that they have all gone from me. Keep faith in God's mercy, and have courage. How have you managed to support yourself and the children all this time? Oh! I fear you have suffered much. Hope does not leave me; I believe I shall live to see you again, and one thing comforts me, you have Jack.

I have no chance to write more. God bless you!

Your faithful, loving J. B.

"Oh! I know we shall have him back safe and sound, I know we shall," said Mrs. Brereton, carried beyond all her daily burden of care and fear. "It will not be long now." Then turning, she put her arms close about her boy and said with the fervor of her full heart: "One thing comforts me, I have Jack!"

Accustomed only to his mother's quiet manner, so dignified and calm that it gave little evidence of her joy or sorrow, the boy was overwhelmed by this unusual exhibition of feeling and could answer nothing, but held her

tightly to his breast, as she stood for a minute or two with her head resting on his shoulder, sobbing violently.

But she quickly drew again the rein of her accustomed self-control and blessed Jack, smiling through her tears and saying: "Father would not believe that you had grown man enough for me to rest my head upon your shoulder. You will never be little Jack again, you poor old boy!"

After Dolly and Floss had seen the priceless bit of paper, and been told that it said, "Father would come by and by," Jack's conscience bade him go back to work, and Mrs. Brereton gave him the letter to show Mr. Thornton when he carried the evening mail. How it had come, who sent it through the lines — for it had been mailed in Washington — served for hours of uninterrupted conversation, but all their speculations brought no clue. They understood why no mention would be made in the letter, lest harm to the messenger might follow, and they

were happy in the dear fact that once more they had seen his handwriting, and knew he lived and hoped.

After this the autumn waned fast, and December came, and death had claimed every herb and tree and flower except those faithful symbols of hope, the evergreens. Jack's way to and from his work often lay through snowy paths, but they were all well, and Jack and his mother were too busy to find much fault with the weather. The "store" and post-office bore ample evidence of the value of the new clerk; the money earned by the faithful workers sufficed, and they possessed their souls in patience.

The recitations to Mr. Holtin were excellent, and the only drawback to the plan was the loneliness entailed on Mrs. Brereton; but she was repaid by Jack's delight in keeping pace with his class.

Deep down in her heart she had grieved to have her boy deprived of the advantages and privileges of his companions, and it was an

immense satisfaction not to have him fall behind them in his chief studies. She often sighed, though it was a proud sigh, when she noticed the gravity and too early maturity of her "comfort boy." Sometimes she feared he was working too hard, but Jack even dreamed of competing for the algebra prize at the Christmas examinations.

And Christmas was not far off now. As it drew nearer, by every train there were comings and goings of busy mothers, intent on future Christmas-trees and thinking of stockings which would need filling; the express office overflowed with oddly shaped parcels of mysterious sizes and shapes, and all the delightful thrill of preparation was in the air; even the Ruremont "store" showed its feeble signs of remembering the coming feast, and tried to look gay and offer suitable goods to its customers. The Breretons' cottage alone seemed out of harmony with the general joyousness, and Jack could see no token that his

mother remembered that the holy day was at hand.

Mrs. Brereton looked very wan and pale, and her delicate hands grew thinner, so that Jack felt as if he could easily crush them in his strong grasp ; but her cheerfulness seemed more natural and her smiles were more frequent since the letter had brought such bright hope to her heart. She spoke frequently now to the children of "When father gets back," without a doubt of his return, yet Jack did not venture to break the silence she kept about Christmas.

But on the Sunday next before the happy day, to his great relief she at last spoke of doing something to honor it. Hitherto Christmas had been a foretaste of Paradise to the children.

"Jack," she said, "we cannot have a Merry Christmas, and at one time I felt as if I could not try to do anything while father was in prison, except to go to church and pray for

him. But something different is in my heart to-day. I have remembered at last that it is dishonoring our dear Lord not to make some one glad for his sake, on his dear birthday. We can't have any presents except some little trifles for the children — and you are not a child any more, poor dear — but we will have a few of our poorest neighbors in, and make a little feast for them on Christmas Eve. It will cost us little, and we shall not grudge the needful self-denial, and I believe it will make us all glad."

Jack was rejoiced.

X.

CHRISTMAS REJOICING.

IN the year 1861, Christmas fell on Sunday, and all the previous week Mrs. Brereton and Jack gave much thought and all the time they could spare, to their plans and preparations, and Dolly showed such delight in the very thought of its approach, that the child's eager face was their best incentive.

Trenchard's scanty stock afforded more room for choice than they required for their small purchases for the children's stockings, and for 'Becca's small brothers and sisters, and Jack's noontimes were spent in bringing laurel and ground-pine from a place his father and he knew well. The house must put on its look of Christmas cheer.

'Becca's whole family, the mother and five

children, were invited to take tea with them on Christmas Eve, and two little half-orphan boys, whose lives were devoid of everything that childhood loves, were added to the grotesque party, whose full dress in some instances lacked shoes, and in others consisted of clothes belonging to other people, either much too large or far too small, as the case might be.

The night proved cold and sharp, and the kitchen, always an ideal room of its class, looked like a picture in a story book, when 'Becca, feeling much at home, opened the door and ushered in her followers. Her mother brought up the rear of the procession with the two forlorn little boys. She had done what she could to give a motherly touch to their worn clothes, had scrubbed the small faces until they shone with soap, which must have tried their endurance in the application, and brushed their hair straight up from their foreheads, where it stood stiffly, giving them a surprised look very comical to see. Holding one

in either hand, the good woman made them scrape their bare red feet upon the door mat vigorously, before she allowed them to go in and speak to Mrs. Brereton.

There were green wreaths upon the dresser and on the mantel-piece and over the snow-white curtains at the windows, and two tables were put together in the middle of the small room, with seats for 'Becca's mother and the seven little ones, and high chairs for Dolly and Floss at what served for the head and foot of the table. Jack, 'Becca and Mrs. Brereton would be too busy to sit down.

A pot of bright scarlet geraniums in the center gave the true Christmas red and green, and round-hearts and peppermint-sticks, oranges and apples, made a great effect of color and brightness.

Well knowing that the coming good meal would unlock their shy and silent tongues, and was the best means to make them feel at home, Mrs. Brereton at once made them sit down.

Dolly's folded hands called them to say grace, and Mrs. Brereton standing behind her chair earnestly asked a blessing, and then proceeded to dispense such roasted turkey and mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce as were hitherto unknown food to her guests. Mrs. Macpherson's teacup was never allowed to stand empty, and milk flowed in a constantly replenishing stream into the children's glasses. Jack's jokes and jollity kept the youngsters shouting with laughter, and there could be no doubt that the entertainment was a great success. Griddle cakes and maple syrup were served for dessert, and although 'Becca cooked with lightning rapidity, she could not keep pace with the demand.

At the very height of the festivity, Jack suddenly saw to his intense surprise and momentary confusion, that Mr. Roberts stood leaning against the dining-room door, looking on with a most amused expression. The front and intermediate doors had been left open to give more

air to the now too warm and redolent kitchen, and he had made his way in unheard.

The intruder made a sign of warning not to betray his presence and stood still, watching the scene with great interest and greater wonder. All this merriment and good cheer afforded to these comfortless and hard-pressed people by those whose every loaf of bread was the result of hard labor, and whose hearts were burdened with never-dying anxiety, and sore with the heavy discipline of sorrow! This was the last Christmas he would ever pass without a share in some such joy as this; that was the first conclusion he arrived at.

Then a glow of affectionate admiration rose in his heart for the delicate, loving woman who so entirely forgot herself in giving this Christmas feast, and he longed to give her control of his full purse to work her will among those whom she might wish to aid. What had he done to make this holy time a source of blessed memories? To be sure he had brought some

carefully chosen gifts now hidden in a shadowy corner of the hall, but this was but gratifying himself. Having too much he had not missed what they cost, and feeling as he did to all beneath that roof, he had but made himself happier by these purchases. Another year he would do good to those whom he neither knew nor loved, and, if it were possible, warm some hearts so fast bound in the iron of misery that they had forgotten how to be thankful. A sudden vista of possible joy opened before him; might it come to him to even warm to life some last spark of human happiness in the hearts of the hitherto evil and unthankful among God's creatures?

Desiring to give 'Becca a chance to rest and eat her own supper, Mrs. Brereton turned to lead the children into the parlor, through the deserted looking dining-room, and with astonishment saw her silent visitor.

"One minute, Mrs. Brereton, please," he said, and raising his arm high, flung a large handful

of small silver pieces among the little flock of flushed and happy children. Instinct did not wait for any invitation, but immediately a scramble began, which resulted in their gathering what to them was a delightfully large harvest of bright coins. Jack quickly equalized the amounts as far as he thought necessary, and by the time they had gotten over this delightful surprise, Mr. Roberts was seated at the long closed piano rattling out jigs and reels in a way that enchanted them all. 'Becca's mother, who lingered to see that in her turn she was comfortably established at the table, vibrated between the griddle and the open door, the very spirit of her far away youth coming back to the sound of long forgotten dances.

As soon as 'Becca's wants were supplied, she and her mother considerably decided "the party was over" and that "the children better return and not bother the poor lady any more," and Mrs. Brereton did not say "No," for the

evening was passing quickly away, and 'Becca had promised to stay behind and get everything in order for the Sunday morning, now so near. Truly happy and quite unrecognizable as the pinched and nervous-looking little ones who had arrived two hours earlier, the small party were soon on their homeward way, laughing and talking at the top of their shrill voices.

No sooner were they gone than Mr. Roberts came forward with Jack and said: "Mrs. Breton, this boy says that he is still supperless, and I have a craving to taste those cakes. I think I remember how they used to taste in New Hampshire, when I was a boy; could 'Becca make a few for us?"

This brought Jack's pleasure to a climax, and I am bound to record that the fastidious man of many clubs, ate in a really shameless way, plate after plate of the pale brown cakes, and found in the syrup the flavor and the memory not only of his grandfather's "sugar camp," but something of his boyish joy.

Ten o'clock drew near, and the train must be caught, and Jack walked down to the road with his good friend. As he came back he halted at the gate and sent a fervent, loving "good-night" to his father on the wings of the keen north wind, and felt that he could report his duty well done for the day.

Returning to his mother, he found her sitting before the fire, looking tired, but peaceful and bright. "Aren't you glad we decided on this way to keep the feast, Jack? They were so happy, and it was such a pleasure!"

"Yes, mammy dear; and Mr. Roberts says you did as much for the rich as for the poor to-night, for he never knew the true Christmas spirit before. Wasn't it funny to see him eat 'Becca's cakes?"

"Yes; I really enjoyed watching him, and think I shall get very fond of him if he is much with us."

"You ought to be, mother, for he thinks you are almost perfect."

There remained still for these faithful, loving hearts, the pleasure of filling the children's stockings and the happy good-night caress to each other, which expressed a love which needed no evidence in material gifts; and then they went to rest carrying their absent soldier in their hearts.

Christmas morning was cold and brilliantly clear. Dolly was awake at cock-crow, and with the happiness of the children, and the lovely cheerfulness of the greenery scenting the house with its spicy breath, there was no lack of Christmas brightness within also.

Both Mrs. Macpherson and 'Becca, after their own early mass, came so that for once Jack and his mother might go to church together, and when they returned, 'Becca had all "Uncle Christopher's" boxes unearthed from their hiding place, and Jack found himself in possession of a fine overcoat and cap and gloves. There were things useful and helpful for each one,

and at noon a big hamper of flowers and delicacies came from Thornhill, and neighborly kindness flowed in upon them from many an unexpected source, all the day.

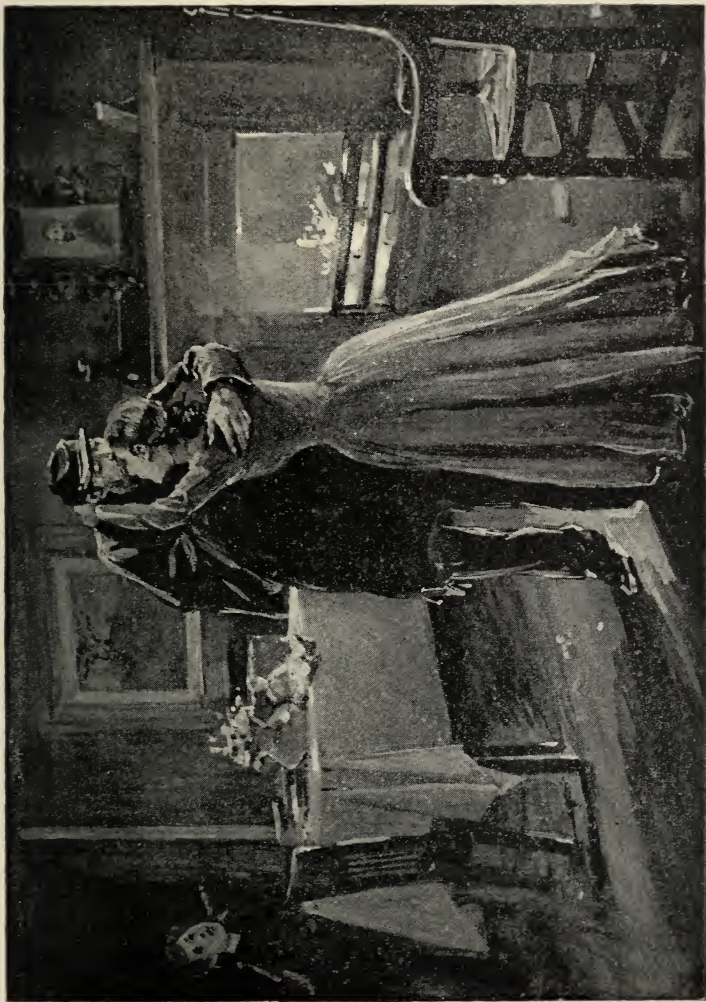
Mrs. Brereton's eyes were lovely with grateful happiness ; God had given them so much ! Yet deep down in her heart there lay the strong craving for one touch of her husband's hand, one word from his long silent voice. Tears lay very near the surface and occasionally one would fall, despite her smiles.

The early twilight closed in ; Jack, having finished all his out-of-door work, coaxed the little girls into the kitchen to give his mother a quiet half-hour before tea ; Mrs. Brereton, thankful for the opportunity, sat before the fire in the cosy little parlor, with the soft glow shining on her face and folded hands, and leaning her head against the high back of her chair, she looked up longingly at the likeness of her husband which hung before her, thickly garlanded with the laurel leaves which Jack had

picked and cleaned from every speck of road-side dust.

At this time, in sharp contrast with the comfortable warmth and dainty sweetness of this room, there came along the road a lonely man, wearing a worn, defaced uniform, and limping painfully. People passed him in the gathering dusk, but no one turned to look at him or speak, for already worn garments and limping feet were, alas! common enough among us, and no one knew this heavily-bearded man, with his sad look of patient suffering, plodding on his painful way absorbed in thought.

The firelight shone out from the friendly window of the Breretons' cottage. He paused to look at it, and then, softly opening the gate, went up the path; but not venturing to step on the veranda, he stood at its edge and looked in. The fireglow sent a soft radiance about the room, and he saw distinctly a sweet, pale face, and a laurel-wreathed picture on the



"JACK CAME RUNNING IN WHITE WITH FEAR."

wall. He ventured with a stealthy tread to creep nearer, and pressed his face against the pane. The figure sitting so motionless within stirred not, except when once with a gentle hand she brushed the moisture from her sad eyes.

The man stole on with the noiseless tread of a thief and turned the latch with what seemed a familiar hand ; then, standing on the threshold, he said in a clear voice: "Mary!" With the swift movement of a wild bird she turned and with a cry of joy flung her glad arms about her husband's neck.

The strange, sharp sound rang through the house, and Jack came running in white with fear, and for an instant in the dusk could not clearly see what was before him ; but a moment's hesitancy was enough, this — this was his father !

One Christmas day amid many happy ones, always wore a crown for Jack. There could never be another joy like this !

Hurriedly sent forward after an exchange, which, though long looked for, came unexpectedly at last, he had in the end kept silence purposely, hoping to reach them for Christmas, yet afraid to raise false hopes. Delays had come, and they only reached New York on Sunday morning, and as no Sunday trains stopped at Ruremont he had walked from the nearest station, and so come upon them unobserved.

Of course they could only have him to themselves for that blessed, perfectly happy night, for, with the morning, everybody claimed a share in their returned hero. The house was never empty; the gate swung to and fro incessantly, and there was joy in every house in Ruremont because John Brereton was safe home from the war.

In every way he was blessed in his return. Overflowing with pride and satisfaction in his boy, saved from immediate strain and anxiety by the money so bravely kept for him, the

long-suffering soldier began to recover his better and more natural looks and to feel again ready for the duties of a peaceful life.

Aided by such friends as Jack had made, he had not long to wait for remunerative employment, which must secure to him and his a future beyond fear of want, and he went and came, the happiest man in the town.

On Jack's bedroom wall hung a beautifully written "honorable discharge," in which his father said in earnest, loving words, that he had done his duty as faithfully and manfully as any man who had "worn the blue" through those hard days, and Jack's children's children will know that he was "mustered in" in 1861.

"Uncle Chris" laid claim to his adopted nephew with such earnestness that Mr. Brereton gave him his heart's desire and yielded Jack's education into his hands. It was the broadest and the best the land affords, and now that the title of the law firm reads "Roberts and Brereton," Mr. Roberts rests

greatly from the office work, and his clients say that the junior partner is a wonderfully capable man. With such clients as Mr. Thornton of Thornhill, and Mr. Hinman to place the great interests they represent in the keeping of the firm, "Roberts and Brereton" grow daily more important in the eyes of the world.

The cottage of 1861 has grown into a much larger and finer house, but no other home could ever be as dear to Mr. and Mrs. Brereton as that place of many memories, and Jack's boy Christopher, walked down there with me this very day, to show me the place where his father took the oath for his three months' service, "while grandfather went to the war."

